

THE ISSUE OF SATIRE AND SOCIAL CRITICISM IN SAID AHMADNINI'S "FORMER" STORY

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the literary-aesthetic features, satirical direction, and socio-philosophical content of the story "Sobiq" by Uzbek People's Writer Said Ahmad. The work sheds light on the issues of artificial hero-making, bureaucracy, flattery, and the ideological falsification of labor values characteristic of the Soviet totalitarian regime, all within a sociological and psychological context. The article also scientifically substantiates the work's relevance to the still-relevant today issues of personality socialization and the manipulation of mass culture.

Keywords: Satire, irony, social criticism, the value of labor, formalism, flattery, Soviet ideology, personality deformation, artistic mastery, Uzbek prose.

Introduction

In the rapidly developing Uzbek literature, the role of Said Ahmad in the development of the genre of **Adab al-Fukaha wa-l-Hija'* (humor and satire) is unparalleled. In the story "Sobiq," the writer creates a parody of a society under the guise of socialist realism. The central theme of the story is the concept of the system-created **البطل الزائف (al-Batal az-Za'if)** (artificial, fake hero). The transformation of a simple worker into a victim of **propaganda (al-Propaganda)** (aggressive ideological propaganda) defines the work's main ideological line. The experience of world literature shows that satire and comedy have always served

as a tool for society's self-purification, exposing social ills and restoring moral balance¹.

In the history of 20th-century Uzbek literature, People's Writer of Uzbekistan Said Ahmad's place is unparalleled in his artistic exploration of social reality in a satirical and humorous vein, and in exposing the contradictions between human nature and social systems. The writer is considered one of the creators who established a distinctive school not only in drama and major prose genres but also in Uzbek short fiction (). Said Ahmad's creative laboratory was characterized by its ability to perceive the most subtle shifts in society and stagnation and deformations in human psychology with a keen eye. His story "The Ex" is one of those monumental works with such a high socio-artistic burden, exposing the flip side of the principles of Soviet-era socialist realism and the system's rotten foundation. The story is not just about the life of a single mechanizer, but about how an entire totalitarian ideology toys with human destiny, It depicts how an entire totalitarian ideology toys with a human destiny, artificially elevating him to the status of an "ideal hero" for a short time, only to then cast him into a spiritual and social void.

Soviet-era ideology used the mass media, literature, and art as aggressive propaganda tools to create the image of the "new Soviet man." Heroism in labor was often based not on real indicators but on plans set from above, fabricated figures, and party reports. In his story "Sobiq," Said Ahmad satirically takes aim at this very social paradox—the deep chasm between a person's real labor and their false, mythologized image as reflected in the media. The work's relevance lies in its exploration of social-psychological issues, namely, the individual's transformation into a victim of false fame, the vices of flattery and formalism, remain a sociologically dangerous trend for today's transitional societies².

In Uzbek literary studies, Said Ahmad's creative work, particularly his skill in creating humor and satire, has been studied by many scholars. Academic Matyoqub Qo'shjanov, speaking about the author's skill in character creation, emphasizes that his characters are always nourished by a realistic and folk-like language. In his fundamental textbook "History of 20th-Century Uzbek Literature," Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor Naim Karimov addresses

¹ Said Ahmad. Selected Works. In Three Volumes. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2014.

² Said Ahmad. Selected Works. In Three Volumes. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2014.

the socio-political roots of Said Ahmad's short story writing, the scholar notes that the writer was able to expose the system's flaws metaphorically and satirically, even under Soviet censorship. Additionally, in his works dedicated to the fundamentals of literary analysis, the literary scholar Hotam Umurov () analyzed the nature of the humor in the story "Sobiq." In his view, the humor in the work is not merely entertaining, but rather it is tragicomic (laughter on the borderline between the grotesque and satire). In Western literary studies, researchers who have studied the relationship between satire and totalitarianism (for example, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization or Northrop Frye's typology of satire) show that the satire in Said Ahmad's story "Sobiq" is aimed at deconstructing social structures.

However, in most existing studies, the story of "Sobiq" has been examined only within the framework of a critique of the Soviet-era cotton campaign. In this article, however, the work is analyzed from a new scientific perspective in the context of the distortion of the character's psychology under the influence of social manipulation, the symbolic violence of the bureaucratic apparatus, and the negative consequences of modern PR (public relations) technologies.

Research Methodology

The following set of scientific methods was used to conduct this research:

- **Historical-comparative method:** The connection between the socio-political landscape of the period in which the story was written (the Soviet stagnation era, the record-breaking movement) and the development of events in the work was studied.
- **Structural-semantic method:** Symbols in the text, ironic and satirical language elements, and the hidden meanings (subtext) of the characters' speech were analyzed.
- **Psychological and sociological approach:** The processes of professional and moral deformation in the character, resulting from the change in his "social status," were studied.
- **Hermeneutic method:** An interpretation of the ideological layers that the author covertly advanced in the text was carried out from a contemporary perspective.

Artistic Features and Satirical Strategy of the Work

The aesthetic power of the story "Sobiq" is evident in its original synthesis of compositional structure and artistic imagery. The image of the ordinary mechanizer (driver) at the heart of the story is depicted in dynamic development, but this development is not the ascent of the character, but rather a regressive process leading to his crisis. Said Ahmad makes very subtle use of the art of **hyperbole** in the work. The hero's reporting "I picked nine tons of cotton," or the formalization of such indicators in his name, is not just a play on numbers. This is an exposure of the "pripiska" (cooking the books) and the false economic victories of that era. The socialist system always needed unnatural, mythical results to prove its viability. The author exposes the system's illogicality by taking this exaggeration to an absurd level³.

One of the most effective literary devices in the story is **the internal irony and psychological irony**. The character's questioning of himself, his astonishment at his own successes, indicates a healthy logic that has not yet been completely extinguished in his psyche:

"Goodness, did I pick all this cotton myself, or did someone else add it?"

Through this sentence, the writer shows that the character himself is both a performer and a victim of this grand ideological theater. Here, the humor shifts from a lighthearted touch to a sharp social satire. The work's visual symbolism is also noteworthy. The hero gradually transforms from a living, hardworking person into a static image on newspaper pages and a lifeless figure on the television screen. Filmmakers film him, and artists paint his portrait. In this process, the person undergoes **"reification."** That is, he is no longer an individual for society, but has already become a propaganda product (a brand) of the party. We can see this socio-artistic metamorphosis through the following schematic table:

³ Karimov N. History of 20th-Century Uzbek Literature. Textbook. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 2010.

Stages of an individual's social transformation

Stages	Character's state	Attitude of the environment and media	State of the machine (working tool)
Stage I	A simple, hardworking, humble mechanizer	Overlooked, an ordinary worker	In good working order, in constant motion and operational
Stage II	Artificial "Hero," record-breaker	Newspapers, television, constant praise	Less used, becomes an exhibit
III stage	"Former" statesman, social climber, passive individual	Beginning of oblivion, mechanical summons only for official events	Rusty, dusty, neglected

As the table shows, the higher the hero's social pseudo-fame rises, the more his real productivity and connection to real life decline. The car's being covered in dust and rust symbolizes the crisis of the protagonist's soul and his professional skills. At the end of the story, the inscription "**former driver**" on his car is the climax of the satire. This word expresses not only the professional demise of the protagonist but also the tragedy of a person used by the system and then discarded once they are worn out.

In the first stage, the hero is not yet caught in the whirlwind of false fame, but appears as a simple, humble mechanizer who can adequately assess his professional skills and his real place in society. During this period, although he remains outside the attention of the mass media and official circles, his primary tool of work—his equipment (machine)—is in constant motion, engaged in a smooth and tireless process of labor. It is precisely this stage that is the period of the individual's inner authenticity and real social usefulness.

During the transition to the second stage, the system's mechanism for creating an artificial "hero" is activated. The hero's exaggerated, unrealistic achievements become the main topic in newspapers, on the radio, and on television. As a result of constant praise, lofty speeches, and official awards, his social status is artificially elevated. However, as a negative consequence of this process, his actual professional activity takes a backseat. His machine is no longer for working in the field, but becomes a kind of "exhibit" to be shown off to visiting dignitaries and journalists.

In the third, and final, stage, the scenario of the individual's complete breakdown and manipulation by the system reaches its conclusion. The protagonist has now become a constant participant in endless meetings, empty formalities, and symbolic gatherings, essentially turning into a passive social element. Most tragically, as time passes and the system has fully exploited his image for propaganda purposes, the social and official interest in him begins to fade, and the process of his forgetting begins. During this period, his machine, once a source of pride but now completely neglected and covered in dust and rust, serves as a visual symbol in direct parallel to the spiritual corrosion of the hero's heart and his professional downfall⁴.

Image System and Social Typecasting

Said Ahmad has created a specific **انموذج اجتماعي (an-Namuzaj al-Ijtima'iy)** (**social type**) through each character in the work. In particular, the character of Rais embodies the institution of **النفاق السياسي (an-Nifaq as-Siyasiy)** (**political hypocrisy and deceit**) in society. The protagonist, as a result of his transition from mechanization to majlisbozlik, becomes alienated from his labor and his selfhood, which is characterized in philosophy by the social phenomenon of **Estilab(al-Istilab)** (**the alienation of the individual from himself and his labor**). Through each character in the work, Sa'id Ahmad typifies a specific social stratum or institution of that society of the . In this regard, **the character of Rais** requires a separate sociological analysis⁵.

The chairman is a representative of the lower echelon of the bureaucratic apparatus, for whom the most important thing is to carry out orders from above and to look "good" in reports. He elevates the hero not out of sincere respect, but to save his own seat and to curry favor with the Raykom (District Committee), hailing him as a "lighthouse of society." The pathos, bombast, and empty sloganeering in the chairman's speech are a parody of the official language of that era. When he turns to the hero and says, "You are our pride, you are the living embodiment of the victory of socialism!" it is not difficult to see the hypocrisy and self-interest behind it.

⁴ Karimov N. History of 20th-Century Uzbek Literature. Textbook. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 2010.

⁵ Said Ahmad. Selected Works. In three volumes. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2014.

On the other hand, **the mass media (journalists, correspondents, filmmakers)** also appear in the work as a distinct collective figure. They do not reflect reality as it is, but rather edit the event according to a "conceptual plan" given from above. Journalists put lofty words into the hero's mouth that he never thought or knew. This shows that the press has become a tool of manipulation and propaganda, not an independent, thinking institution. The hero himself (whose name the author deliberately generalized or made universal) is a victim of social-psychological passivity. At first, he tries to resist and speak the truth, but the immense pressure of the system and the psychological impact of sweet praise overwhelm him. Human nature is inclined toward praise and attention. Said Ahmad has managed to find this delicate string in human psychology. The protagonist gradually gets used to sitting in meetings, giving fake lectures, and being applauded, and this becomes a normal way of life for him.

Social and Scientific Interpretation of the Story

The story "Sobiq" must be evaluated from a scientific-theoretical standpoint based on the principles of sociological and philosophical determinism. In sociology, there is a concept called "**social deformation of personality.**" This process occurs when a person becomes detached from their real functional duties and excessively involves in the artificial social role imposed on them. As the Western sociologist Erving Goffman noted in his theory of "Patronage and Social Roles," institutions have a tendency to "stamp" people for their own purposes. The Soviet totalitarian system also functioned as such a "total institution." It turned people into mechanical parts. This is vividly reflected in the story "The Former": instead of the mechanizer controlling his machine, the system begins to use him as a cog in its political machinery.

Additionally, the work can be analyzed from the perspective of **the sociology of labor**. In the slogans of the socialist society, labor was proclaimed the highest value ("He who does not work, does not eat," "Heroism in Labor"). However, Said Ahmad reveals the paradox: the person who actually works is left out, while the one who engages in the promotion of labor is rewarded. This leads to a decline in labor motivation and the rise of deceit in society. When a hero is giving

speeches at presidiums instead of picking cotton in the field, others are forced to do his work. This is the ultimate form of social injustice⁶.

Spiritual-Philosophical Content and Personality Psychology

At the story's core lie serious philosophical and existential questions:

- What is the true meaning of human life?
- Are fame and recognition enough for human happiness?
- Where is the line between authenticity and falseness?

As the author exposes the weaknesses of the human psyche, he evokes not anger but a deep sense of pity for it. The protagonist was initially a simple, conscientious man. He made a living through his own labor. However, the artificial "social capital" (fame, privileges, titles) bestowed upon him began to eat away at his inner world. This is a phenomenon similar to **the "Dunning-Kruger effect"** in psychology and the process of losing adequacy in a person's self-assessment. When a person overestimates their real abilities, personal growth stops.

The philosophy of time also plays an important role in the work. The hero's most productive, force-filled youth is wasted on fruitless meetings, meaningless applause, and gatherings with the same script. This is a waste of a life. Said Ahmad's philosophy teaches that, like any artificial thing, artificial fame is short-lived. When the system changes or a new, younger "hero" is found, the old hero is forgotten and left alone on the margins of society, with the false title of "ex-⁷." This situation is a profound **existential tragedy** (an identity crisis) for the individual. Because he can no longer be a simple worker, nor is he needed by the upper echelons. At the end of the story, the inscription "ex-driver" on his rusty car triggers an أزمة الهوية (Azmat al-Huviyya) (**identity crisis, the tragedy of completely losing one's self**) in the protagonist's psyche. The tragedy of a person chasing ***al-Majd az-Za'if* (false glory)** is that when he is no longer needed by the system, he is discarded to the margins of life like a worn-out part.

Modern Context and the Practical Significance of the Work

Although the Soviet Union has long since collapsed, the social and psychological issues raised in the story "The Former" remain relevant. In today's information

⁶ Umurov H. Foundations and Methodology of Literary Analysis. – Tashkent: Akademnashr, 2018.

⁷ Yuldashev Q. The Allure of an Introduction to Literary Studies. – Tashkent: Yangi asr avlodi, 2017.

age, with the development of social networks (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.), the technology of "creating a fake persona" has become even more advanced. Today, "fake" accounts on social networks (fake) success, chasing likes and subscribers, and trying to show off one's real life and potential through visual manipulation is a modern version of the same lie of "I picked nine tons of cotton." Today's "bloggers" or "infopoliticians" sometimes live like Said Ahmad's character, without real content, surviving solely on PR and advertising.

From this perspective, the story "Sobiq" should be studied in educational institutions not only as a literature lesson but also as a case study within the fields of sociology, media and cultural studies, and personality psychology. This work serves to develop **critical thinking** in young people and to build immunity against information manipulation ⁸.

In conclusion, Said Ahmad's story "Sobiq" is not merely a local work reflecting the problems of a specific period of the last century, but a universal literary gem that raises universal and global social issues. Through his high satirical skill, mastery of language, and sharp social insight, the author has vividly exposed the totalitarian system's policy of depersonalization.

The humor in the work is instructive, warning, and awakening. The author calls on the reader to oppose any form of formalism, hypocrisy, and flattery in society. Most importantly, the work encourages a person to preserve their true self, sincerity, and the values of honest labor under any circumstances. For what truly ennobles a person is not the false commotion around them, but the real and sincere benefit they bring to society and the people.

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