

Tradition of the Ashugh Poetry and Ashughs in Georgia

Ilyas ÜSTÜNYER

Abstract

Having been disseminated over a huge geographic area the Ashugh literature has become enriched with colours and depths of many cultures throughout its seven centuries-long history. It is impossible to identify the country of origin and the primary social form of the given literary genre according to the sources. Nevertheless by the traces available in various cultural areas, the richness of form and content and the method of their juxtaposition it is yet possible to establish the main ways of dissemination of this literature. Georgia is the rarest of the places where Ashugh literature acquired a new form and content.

Study of development of this tradition in Georgia will make a solid contribution to investigation of the issue which is an objective of the present article.

Keywords: *Ashugh literature in Georgia; Georgian representatives of Ashugh literature; Similarity and differences of the Ashugh poetry in the region; Forms of performance of Ashugh literature.*

Ilyas Üstünyer is an associate professor and Lecturer of Turkish Language and Literature at Faculty of Humanities of International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia, ilyas.ustunyer@ibsu.edu.ge, ilyasustunyer@hotmail.com

Introduction

Arabian word “ashik” (another variant is “yshk”) - ashugh first appearing in Anatolian Turkish language in the 13th century in mystras of folk poet Yunus Emre (1240-1320), where he refers to himself as “ashik Yunus”, entered the folklore as well. In the 14th century Sufi poet from Khorasan Ashik-Pasha (1272-1333), the author of Garibnâme (Poem of a vagabond) consisting of 12 thousand couplets, used this word as an attribute instead of his real name Ali (Timurtaş 2000: 204).

Folklorist, Professor Pertev Naily Baratov subdivides the institution of Ashughs with the past of seven centuries into 4 main directions:

1. Sufi Ashughs;
2. Urban Ashughs;
3. Rural Ashughs;
4. Nomadic Ashughs (wandering Ashughs).

The most significant role in the dissemination of the institution of Ashughs among nations and maintenance of this culture until the early 20th century was played by nomadic ashughs.

I. Historical development trends and primary dissemination area of the institution of Ashughs in Georgia

In Turkish folklore the word “ashik” acquired social and ideological meaning only in the 17th century. “.... Folk narrators recited their poems to the saz accompaniment. Therefore, they were often called Saz poets. Such narrators were mentioned as “ozans” in Oguz tribes. The term was used until the 16th century. From the 17th century it was replaced with terms “ashik” and “Saz poet” (Timurtaş 2000: 25).

Even though it is impossible to establish exactly when the Georgian equivalent of the Turkish word “ashik” - “ashugh” first appeared in the written Georgian literature, the above-mentioned versification appeared in the Georgian literature in the 18th century. Ashugh tradition in Georgia which continued until the end of the first quarter of the 20th century existed in an individual form, avoiding socialization. Despite of the fact that the given tradition did not leave a particularly deep footprint in the Georgian literature, it aroused interest among some Georgian literature theorists owing to its originality (Шакулашвили 1967: 4). It is widely known that

ashughs were among narrators in the court of the Georgian king David VI.

Institution of ashughs was founded in the south-west Georgia, in Javakheti and Trialeti. It was due to the fact that Turkish language which was an element of the ashugh tradition was spoken in this region. According to Azerbaijani sources, dissemination of the Turkish language in the mentioned region is connected with the period of rule of Shah Ismail (1502-1524) (Hacılar 2007: 58). It has also been proved that during this epoch Armenians residing in these two regions used to write, speak and create their writings in Turkish language. Georgian scientist M. Beltadze and the Russian poet M. Lermontov wrote: “Turkish was an international language in the South Caucasus during that period”. (Lermontov 1935:393). Diaries of E. Takaishvili saved at K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts contain data which elucidate this issue (Hacılar 2007: 59). Turkologist Marr also points to dissemination of the Turkish language in the patterns of Ashugh literature recorded in the 16th and 17th centuries.

According to another point of view ashugh poetry came to Georgia from Iran. But resemblance of the poetry of the Georgian ashughs with Anatolian patterns confirms the links between nomadic ashughs and Georgian ashugs proved by Baratov. Despite the fact that with the lapse of time, the mentioned tradition which had integrated with the Georgian culture, underwent changes and acquired local form and content, the above-mentioned link is undisputed. Traditions of the ashugh poetry in Georgia and Iran sufficiently differ from each other. Moreover, the Georgian form is absolutely unknown to Iranian ashughs while the Georgian patterns are identical with the poetry of the Turkish nomadic ashughs both in form and content.

Institution of ashughs is rather multifunctional in Georgia. In the 18th and partly 19th century many ashughs could be encountered in cities, villages, among craftsmen, on family tables, at the national and church feasts.

Having created musical pieces from the works of ashugs a composer Dimitry Arakishvili made a solid contribution to the maintenance of the mentioned tradition originating in the 18th century for the future generations. In Georgia, where very many church feasts are celebrated, ashughs used to participate in the celebration of the days of Icon

Patron Saints. Among them were singers, narrators, creators of dastans (epic stories) playing saz, who demonstrated their skills during such feasts by accompanying to themselves on various musical instruments and competing with each other. The listeners tried not to miss any detail from the performance of ashughs who had been in high favour with people that time. The plot of the story by Russian poet Lermontov “*Ashugh Gharib*” was borrowed during his stay in Georgia (Qurbanov 1980:159).

Along with dissemination of the Turkish language, great influence was exerted on the development of ashugh poetry by multicolourness of cultures whose bearers were caravans stopping at caravansaries moving along the Great Silk Road passing through Georgia. This route leading from China to the West linked Istanbul with Tebriz passing through the north of the Caucasian state Azerbaijan, Tiflis, Erzurum, Sivas, Ankara, Bursa. 40 caravansaries were located in the Tebriz-Istanbul area.

Owners of caravans covering several thousand kilometers on their camels along the route passing through many countries used to get familiarized with their poetry, dastans, heroic and love epos, stories about Crusades, sophisticated knowledge of Muslim rulers, love recollections from Palestine or Bosphorus, mountaineer revolts and when stopping at caravansaries they used to retell what they had heard before thus being creators and disseminators of various cultures (Kan 2006:282-286). Sallies of wit, anecdotes, stories... as well as morale of fables, observations of nature etc. were recorded by some listeners and enriched with their cultural ornament; they were, in fact, created anew. This is best proved by the area of dissemination of the above-mentioned works, filled by local peculiarities on their way – from Iran to Italy including Georgia and afterwards further to the North Africa.

Special narrators and wandering ashughs at caravansaries used to tell to the guests legendry from “*The Book of my grandfather Korkut*” fairytales from “*One Thousand and One Nights*”, anecdotes by Khodja Nasreddin, love epos of *Asli and Qerem*, *Takhir and Zukhra*, *Ashik Gharib* (Lermontov 2002:205-214), heroic stories of Koroglu for the purpose of pastime, apart from for didactic reasons (Aliyeva 1975; Çladze 2004).

Hacılar, particularly mentions the works of N. Marr who during his stay in the south-west Georgia in 1904-1905 recorded the history and

works of ashughs of this region heard from the ashugh Ali Chavush Mosidze being on a visit to the village Imerkhevi. (Mapp 1911:VII; Hacilar 2007:46), the most interesting among them are *Pharkhad and Shirin*, *Asli and Qerem*, *Yarly Mahmud*, *Shah Ismail* and etc.

Diaries kept by E. Takaishvili during his expedition in Meskheti and Javakheti in 1917 contain significant material connected with the region. Particular interest is aroused by mentioning of the fact that population spoke both Georgian and Turkish in many villages of the region (Hacilar 2007:62).

Ioseb Grishashvili in his work “*Literary Bohemia of the Old Tbilisi*” published in 1977 tells us many interesting facts about ashughs and their traditions in Georgia.

“One of the ashughs used to write a riddle in verses on a piece of paper. These papers attached to Qerman shawl and Baghdad silk woven from golden and silver hanks were hung on walls in coffee houses and they tried to guess the riddle, which took hours sometimes. If the riddle was not guessed the money thrown on the shawl was left to the author of the riddle”.

Grishashvili describes his epoch in the following manner; “... Despite the fact that it has become fashionable to move away from the East, it is impossible to erase the trace of the East in Georgia, which is a part of this East”.

Sometimes ashughs used to share their art with listeners during religious feasts. They waited for their turn to come in order to perform their legendry. Being insusceptible to benevolence of the great, ashughs, deserving love of commons, competed with each other and responded by means of improvisation to the verses resembling riddles in form which were recorded on paper.

Here are some examples of such verse-riddles:

- “First it ate clover and straw, so a question arose. Only the chin was left from it. The one who cuts it will defeat the enemy. What a miracle is it, I am waiting for the answer, tell me, what is it?

- “This is head of the ass. Mouth and ears as well. It got on his hind legs inspired by courage of the brave Samson and the enemy has escaped. The battle is lost and he is defeated...”

Competitions of ashughs could be seen in various places of the city and at theaters. The different content of these competitions was striking. The stages reminded of counters of markets where the choir, singers, musicians were accommodated and ashughs performed to the accompaniment of the Georgian national instrument chonguri, replacing each other (Гришашвили 1977:47-50).

The first ashugh;

«Tell me what falls to the ground from the sky?

Who calms down sooner of all?

What is passed from hand to hand?»

The second ashugh;

«Rain falls down to the ground from the sky.»

A child calms down sooner of all.

Money is passed from hand to hand»

The first ashugh;

«What remains dry in water?

Guess what does not become dirty in the ground?

Tell me the name of the bird living alone in the nest»

The second ashugh;

«Light does not become wet in water.

Only stones at the pier remain clean.

The name of the bird living in its nest in loneliness is heart. »

After that the market square (in Georgian it means a wide counter for merchants) was changed again and ashughs began to narrate their legendry (it also means narration at summer theaters, performance on wheels).

Ashugh theater appeared in Georgia in the 80-s of the 19th century. In the 19th century Tiflis ashughs used to gather and perform in Ortachala district, at Sheitan Market/Yerevan Square – the favorite place for walking in long and boring winter evenings. People called this place Sheitan market because of constant noise. Ashughs used to gather in coffee houses at this square bearing the name of Lenin in the Soviet era now renamed into Freedom Square and entertain people (Ткешелашвили 1958:36).

In those times there were seven coffee houses at Sheitan market (Memedoğlu 2009:42). Grishashvili wrote; “I was lucky enough to see a Turkish ashugh performing a dastan Koroglu to the accompaniment of his saz in these coffee houses”.

Performance of a wandering ashugh-Turk narrating about love of Koroglu to Khan's daughter and her abdication as well as his heroic deeds for more than two hours was interrupted by applause and money reward

several times. Simultaneously, in other premises of the coffee house there was a performance of shadow theatre Khadjivat-Karagoz (Гришашвили 1977:49). “The most well-known stage director of the theater Karagoz in Turkey – Bekir Khakizzade effendi showed performances on winter evenings from 7 p.m. till 00 p.m. Performance were made in legendry form even though the major part of the work was of satiric nature (Memedoğlu 2009:42).

Particularly interesting in the content of performances where the lessons taught to the people, explanation of one Sheikh trying to change the morale of the Sultan Murad, didactic expressions mainly directed at ephemeral nature of the Universe. These narrations retelling that each person like Khadjivat and Karagoz on the stage is just a shadow, that after a second appearance they will cease their physical existence, and that it is no use grieving about perishable world, were brought to listeners on behalf of Sultan Murad.

Thus Karagoz Shadow Theater appeared. According to legends, after leaving the Sultan Palace Karagoz went throughout the East, got off on squares and after entering Tiflis *kavakhanas* (coffee is called “kava” in Georgian) he settled there for a long time.

Peoples' artist of Georgia, actor of Tbilisi State Azeri Drama Theater Ibragim Isphekhanli recollects that the coffee house belonged to Yakub Shukru Effendi who had arrived from Turkey; “Ashughs used to gather and retell dastans of their times in chaikhanas at Sheitan market. Ashughs used to gather in these places mainly in the months of Ramadan. Besides, one more big chaikhana at the bank of the river Mtkvari belonged to Yakub Shukru effendi who had arrived from Turkey a very long time ago” (Memedoğlu 2009:42)

Grishashvili, who mentions that these performances, even though modernized, could be seen in the last quarter of the 20th century, writes; “More modernized plays have borrowed some scenes from ethic texts”.

Several Shadow Theatres in Tbilisi were transformed into Satire Theatre later where all layers of society were ridiculed – the rich and the poor, aristocrats and the rootless, the weak and the strong. The owner of the Theater was called Karagoz.

II. Ashughs of Georgia creating in Turkish

Representatives of various ethnic groups residing in Georgia have made a solid contribution to the existence of the art and institution of ashughs in Georgia until the 20th century. Georgians, Azeri and Armenians should be particularly mentioned among these.

A. Georgian Ashughs

In the documents saved at the Literature Museum of the Manuscripts Fund of Georgia, K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts, archives of Sh. Rustaveli Literature Museum, Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe museums of regional studies, as well as in materials collected by Valekh Khadjilar during his trip to this region in 1980-82 we can discover names of the Georgian ashughs reciting verses, dastans in Turkish and gathering people in this region in the 18-19th centuries. Among them are: ashugh Rukhani (Ioseb Beridze), ashugh Shivga (Luka Beridze), Giorgi Sarachashvili, ashugh Levan Tavrishvili, ashugh Yarali – wounded Torolashvili, ashugh Zeyin (Topo Beridze), ashugh Sandro Zedginidze, ashugh Pektayi (Aghop Zavadze), ashugh Mikheil Zazadze, ashugh Niko Davlasheridze, Sephyl – fortuneless Lado (Vladimer Beruashvili) etc. Also ashugh Kavrishvili and ashugh Eto (Eqvtime Davlasheridze) who had been creating his works till the 90-s of the 20th century.

“In the 19th century Saz was played in Meskhети and Javakheti. Tiflis ashughs also used Georgian national instruments: chonguri, kamancheh and tambourine. Ashugh Shivga from Prtena born in 1838 performed about 2 thousand of his works created both in Georgian and Turkish to the accompaniment of self-made saz. The grandson of the ashugh resides until the present day in village Toloshi, Aspindza region. It is known that 7 ashughs lived in village Prtena in the 19th century ... Works of Georgian ashughs were given a musical form by Valerian Magradzian.... Particular attention should be attached to the influence of Anatolian dastans on the Turkish writings of the ashugh Sandro Kavrelishvili (1880-1971) in the south-west Georgia.... Ashugh Topo Beridze (1855-1918) performed his writings from Childyr to Baiburt The last representative of the institution of ashughs in Georgia – ashugh Eto participated in meetings of Karayazi-Borchala ashughs” (Hacılar 2007:68-76).

B. Azerbaijani Ashughs

“A. Khakhanov (Khakhanashvili) subdivides all Georgian folk songs into two groups – Georgian and Tatar (Azerbaijani). In Tiflis aristocratic circles performers playing saz (Georgian – sazandari) were listened to with particular pleasure. Tar and Kamancheh also were their favourite instruments. Georgian poets Besiki and Nikoloz Baratashvili (the latter became familiarized with the Turkish culture during his office as a Governor in Gandja) played Kamancheh well. Influence of ashugh literature is evident in writings by Besiki and Alexander Chavchavadze. In the Georgian Soviet encyclopedia it is mentioned that works of the two above-mentioned poets were often performed to the accompaniment of saz (Грузинская советская энциклопедия 1977:69).

The most famous ashughs of the 19th century were Shamchi Melko, Settar, Khezir, Evangula, S. Peshangishvili, I. Imiridze (monk Derdimend). Influence of these experts of ashugh literature on the Georgian writers and Romantic poets is also mentioned by literature historian K. Kekelidze in his monograph “History of the ancient Georgian literature”. When the Georgian poet-Romanticist Nikoloz Baratashvili got acquainted with Azerbaijani ashugh Settar in Nakhichevan he considered him superior to other Azerbaijani ashughs and used to enjoy his company at entertaining meetings. Abdulbagi Zulalov who arrived in Tiflis in the last quarter of the 19th century and had lived here for 20 years was given a name Bulbuljan by Georgians. Alahverdi also known as a court singer exerted a great influence on Alexander Chavchavadze. In the book of records written by the poet Ietim Gurji in 1895 (and saved at the Institute of Manuscripts of Georgia) who participated in celebrations dedicated to the drive through Tiflis by A. Pushkin in 1829, the names of these Azerbaijani ashughs are mentioned: M. Vapiff, Sayat-Nova, Kuchuk Nova, Tudjari, Uzun Oglan, Ashik Imran, Seirani, Usta Sefer, Ashik Deday, Kul Ali, Eksuz Oglan etc...

C. “Armenian” Ashugh; Sayat-Nova

Ancestors of Sayat-Nova who is considered to be the Father of the ashugh traditions in Georgia settled in the suburban area of that time, currently known as Avlabar, Armenian district of Tiflis after arriving from a Syrian city of Aleppo in the 17th century. The sources not revealing his nationality (the poet writes in his poem “Tiflis – my homeland”: “... my

mother is from Avlabar, my father is from Aleppo”) state that he was born by the father Karapet Sayatyan and Armenian mother named Sara at the beginning of the 18th century (Гайсарян 1963:6).

Various scientists mention different years as the year of birth of Sayat-Nova: 1705, 1712 and even 1717. According to some scientists the poet was born in 1726 (Medulashvili 2005:25). The real name of the poet is Harutyun Sayatyan. According to a legend, the pseudonym Sayat-Nova was selected by him since it means “the King of Reciters”, by another version the name was chosen due to its meaning “Lord of music”. Some legends say this word means “A new teacher”.

Gaysaryan as the author of the poet's biography considers that taking into account the Turkish origin and meaning of the word “Nova” – “grandson”, the name Sayat-Nova means “Grandson of Sayatyan” (Гайсарян 1963:6-7).

It should be particularly mentioned that Sayat-Nova performed his works with equal beauty in all three languages to the accompaniment of saz. His poems written in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages were published in different times and in different places. Lyrical writings of the ashugh written in Azerbaijani language were published in Azerbaijan in three languages in 1963 (Шакулашвили 1967:3).

Doctoral thesis was dedicated to a part of Azerbaijani poems by the ashugh poet at Tbilisi State University led by a famous Turkologist S. Janashia. The author of the Thesis Shakulashvili dedicates the first chapter to the question of creature/nature in poems by Sayat-Nova. In the second chapter he describes the list of writings by Sayat-Nova made by the prince Teimuraz juxtaposing the Azerbaijani and Georgian variants. In the third chapter their analysis is presented while in the fourth chapter the list of Teimuraz is juxtaposed with Sayat-Nova Book saved in Yerevan. The poems are recorded in Cyrillic alphabet in Azerbaijani language.

Taking into account the metaphoric structure of the poems by Sayat-Nova it is impossible not to catch the semantic parallels with the Divan poetry of the 16-17th centuries:

“ ...

The monk who will drink it swaying, will give up his head

....”

From this point of view many of his *mysras* bear culturological resemblance with the semantic structure (*ser/head, bâde/wine, pir/monk...* etc.) of *Divan* poetry.

In *Sayat-Nova* poems as well as in the writings attributed to him there are many *mysras* confirming his connection with *Qur'an*. This is proved by one of his poems.

“... Even a leaf will not fall from a tree

Without the will of Allah...”

Sayat-Nova, famous for his lyrical poems in *Tiflis* with population more than 20 thousand could be encountered in the streets of the city mumbling words accompanied with a merchant. Besides, he often performed in the palace of the last Georgian king *Irakli II*. Consequently, *Sayat-Nova* who enjoyed great respect of the king was expelled from the palace because of a made-up love story (*Medulashvili 2005:24*). In one of his couplets he blames his tongue for this and addresses the king *Irakli*:

“You should have beaten me, not expelled

If you are my spiritual father and my spiritual mother.

.... Even if my bones are crushed from beatings

I will not renounce you if I am alive.

If I am not drowned in *Mtkvari*, I will jump into the sea,

Why have you worsened your troubles with your tongue?

Sayat-Nova, be ready for sorrow!”

After his expulsion from the palace, the *ashugh* became a clergyman in *Saingilo*. Poems of this period are distinguished by emotionality and sensibility. After death of his wife, *Sayat-Nova* took the monastic vows in *Haghpat* monastery.

According to the poet, his first writing dates back to the year 1742 and the last one – to the year 1759.

Sayat-Nova, who died in 1795 during invasion of Iranian Shah *Agha Mohammed Khan* in Georgia (*Tkeshelashvili 1958:62*), in his poems

“Diyeler”, “Kövül”, “Yüküm”, “Üstine”, “Efendüm, Ey”, “Yolında”, “Nazım Var”, “Üzi Gül”, “Olma”, “Gözelden”, “Senden”, “Bundadır”, “Tusağıyam”, “Neyselün” wrote mainly about love, slavery, beauty, friendship, nature, religious and social questions as well as multicolourness of life of Arabs, Armenians and Georgians.

Sayat-Nova was often blamed both by his contemporaries and his successors of being a feudal man. Sayat-Nova asserted that some Georgian intelligents and first of all the poet-Romanticist Nikoloz Baratashvili expressed reaction to his writings which had a negative influence on his performances (Шакулашвили 1967:10).

Many works dedicated to writings of Sayat-Nova are saved at the Public Library of Georgia. The most recent research is “Sayat-Nova” by a writer M. Razmadze published in 2004. Along with several poems borrowed from the poet, Razmadze also mentions some Bohemian elements dominating in his poems. The chapter of the book containing comments has a title “Ashugh: Attractive Knight” (Размадзе 2004:14).

The literary path beaten by him in the Georgian literature in ashugh poetry genre was continued by two ashughs. Still, the influence of these ashughs whose ethnic background is unknown, was restricted.

One of them who called himself Azyra, was Abram Abramashvili (1845-1922) was from Tiflis. Azyra had many disciples. According to legends they were blind ashughs. Many aphorisms by Azyra have become popular with common people. The second was Ietim Gurji whom we had already mentioned above.

Conclusion

Georgia is one of the rarest places where many cultures developed, but their mutual influence has not been studied sufficiently. Researches, which will be carried out in this multicultural country in the light of national culture (folklore), will reveal many common values and make them a subject of discussion. Therefore, ashugh tradition in Georgia is expecting a thorough study.

References

- Aliyeva (1975), D., Koroğlu'nun Gürcü Varyantı, Elm ve Hayat, Baki.
Çlaidze (1994), L., Koroğlu Gürcistan'da (Translated by: Habib İdrisi, Dr. Hacı Ali

Necsefoğlu), Taşmedrese Publications, İstanbul.

Гайсарян (1963), С., Сайад-Нова, Заметки о жизни и творчестве великого армянского поэта, Знание, Тбилиси.

Грузинская советская энциклопедия (1977), Тбилиси, Том 2

Naçılar (2007), Valeh, Azerbaijan-Gürcü Folklor Elaqleri, "Universal" Publish House, Tiflis.

Kan (2006), K., As Cultural Bridge Between Asia and Europe Anatolian Caravanserais on Silk Road, 3rd International Silk Road Symposium, IBSU Journal, Tbilisi.

Lermontov (2002), M. Y., İblis, Bir Doğu Öyküsü, İthaf (prepared by: Kayhan Yükseler), YK Publications, İstanbul.

Март (1911), Н., Дневник поездки в Шавшети и Кларжетию- тексты и раскзания по армянско-грузинской филологи, Кн. VII, С.-Пб.

Март (1949), Н., Поездка Мара в южную Грузию, изд. Акад. Наук. Груз. ССР, Тбилиси.

Medulashvili (2005), Zezva, Saiad Nova, "Kavkasiuri Sakhli" Publish House, Tbilisi. (in Georgian)

Memedoğlu (2009), Mirza, Qadim Tiflis, "Elm ve Tahsil" Publications, Bakı.

Qurbanov (1980), Ş, Edebi Dotluq, Bakı.

Размадзе (2004), М., Сайад-Нова, Тбилиси.

Timurtaş (2000), F., Tarih İçinde Türk Edebiyatı, Boğaziçi Publish House, İstanbul.

Ткешелашвили (1958), Г. И., Литературный Тбилиси, Сабчота Сакартвело, Тбилиси.

Шакулашвили (1967), Г. Н., Азербейджнские стихи Сайад-Новы по списку Цравича Теймураза, Овтореферат, Тбилиси