Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh, the People’s Poet of Azerbaijan was born in 1925 to the family of a worker in Shaki. He moved to Baku at an early age with his family. Upon finishing secondary school in 1942, the young poet had already written his first voluminous poem “Fall Nightingale” dedicated to Muhammad Hadi.

The scientific-pedagogical activity of the poet is closely connected with Baku State University. He obtained doctoral degree in the theme of "Life and Creative Activity of Samad Vurgun" in 1964. He was the professor of the Chair of Modern Azerbaijan Literature at Baku State University (1950-1990). He was elected correspondent member (1980) and active member of ANAS (2000), as well as deputy to the 10th summon of Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan and National Assembly of Azerbaijan in 1995 and 2000. He was awarded the State Premium of Azerbaijan in 1976 and the honorary name of People’s Poet in 1984.
The national revival movement of 1941-1946 in South Azerbaijan had a significant impact on the poet. Such events gave an impetus to Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh to become active as one of the leaders of national freedom movement having revived since sixties. He depicted the historical tragedy of separated Azerbaijan in the voluminous poem of "Gulustan", which he wrote in 1958 and joined the fair fight of Azerbaijani people for freedom and independence. The poem was written as an embodiment of integration of Azerbaijani people in a state. The poet was one of the leaders of national movement, which started in 1988.
The poet expressed the sorrow of people, whose national personality was trampled on and suffered deprivation during the Soviet regime, by means of symbols and literary approaches and could evade censorship by disguising the events in his voluminous poems and plays under the history or ascribing to other states. What concerns his works directly exposing Soviet dictatorship, he published them under the title of “Sounds from the Chest” upon the collapse of Soviet Union.

Having read B.Vahabzadeh’s book “We are Passengers of the Same Ship”, the great Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aytmatov wrote: “All that surround us make the poet think... This is the major goal and reason of the great thinker’s primal success.”
Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is known as a prominent people’s poet restoring the ideas of national independence and freedom in the modern national poetry of Azerbaijan. Having merged the traditions such as sage and philosophical profundity of ancient Azerbaijani poetry with the modern style of poem, the poet created perfect epic, lyric and dramatic works. He is also the author of a number of scientific works. The basic goal and the major theme of his poetry is Motherland. After S. Vurgun, the main development direction of poetic style of Azerbaijani poetry is basically identified by his creative activity. The poet has no poem written by the requirements of traditional Soviet ideology. The sixties are considered the years of maturity of his creativity. His literary works such as “Gulustan”, one of his first voluminous poems, Shabi-hijran (“Night of Parting”) dedicated to Fuzuli, “Mugam” about mugams, “Weeping-Laughing” dedicated to genius poet Sabir were innovation in the poetry of that time. “Independence”, “Contrasts”, “Price”, “The Abandoned”, “Martyrs” and his other poems have a great significance in his creativity and in the development of Azerbaijani poetry.

The memorial monument of Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh built up in the center of Baku

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with his daughter Gulzar, 1970
B. Vahabzadeh is the author of more than 70 poem books, two monographs, eleven scientific-publicistic books, hundreds of articles, as well as more than 20 voluminous poems with historical or modern theme. He translated the poem “The Bride of Abidos” by Byron into native language. Besides it, his translations from Pushkin, Lermontov and Nekrasov are successful literary samples. The poet’s books of poems, dramas and publicistic works were translated into many languages of the world, as well as English, French, German, Persian, Turkish, Polish, Spanish, Hungarian and languages of post-Soviet nations.
The prominent poet died on February 13, 2009 at the age of 83 in Baku and was buried in the Honorary Cemetery. Three documentaries about him and television films on the motives and scenario of his works were shot. His monument was built up in Shaki city.

Appreciative statements about Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh:

“There are many popular poets in the world. However, when you look through the newspapers and magazines, the real poets turn out to be few. When you feel lonely in search of answer to the question “What is the life?”, only the real poets whose words are made up of thought, image, spirit and breath can cheer you up, inspire to live. Our contemporary poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is one of those. “I was given birth by belief and I am the son of belief...” In my opinion, these lines are very symbolic and characteristic for the creativity of poet. Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is building up his magnificent temple of poetry. He is powerful. The hands building up this temple are skillful and mighty.”

Chingiz Aytmatov

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh and Najmaddin Arbakan, ex-premier of Turkey

The People’s Poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with Sabir Rustamkhanli, the deputy and Khoshgadam Hidayatgizi, the journalist

Abel Maharramov, the rector of Baku State University makes speech in the ceremony of 85th anniversary of people’s poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh
“...Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh... is one of the happy poets who has been loved, closely followed and cherished great hopes by readers since his youth owing to his innate poetic talent... There is no contradiction between Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh and his hero.”

Mehdi Huseyn.

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh in his native land Shaki

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with Alparslan Turkesh, Turkish military man and politician

“Vahabzadeh’s poetry is one of the interesting events of modern Azerbaijani literature.”

Rasul Rza.
“Vahabzadeh benefited by literary legacy of Fuzuli, Vagif, Sabir, S.Vurgun, Ashug Alesger, Shahriyar of our poetry. He plays with word so skillfully, works out so striking contrast, changes the idea so suddenly, extends it and generalizes so philosophically that you can’t help getting amazed and feel extreme joy and aesthetic pleasure.”

Mirza Ibrahimov.

Bakhtiyar is happy, because he is loved by people and people are happy because they have Bakhtiyar.”

Niyazi

The lyceum of social sciences named after Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh in Adana, Turkey

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with the famous Azerbaijani musicians – Shovkat Alakbarova and Habil Aliyev

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with Russian poet Yevegeniy Yevtushenko
“Bakhtiyar is a poet who gained people’s and land’s love and care. And this is the greatest happiness for a man of letter.”

Balash Azeroglu.

The tanker named after Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh

“What Bakhtiyar writes is sincere, natural and disinterested. We don’t feel fake elements in his lyrics”.

Ilyas Afandiyev.
“Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is famous and favorite poet all over the country... His poetry encompasses all beautiful features specific to the East...”

Ojjas Suleymanov.

“Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh taught us that the native language of each nation is its honour and conscience. It is the most valuable heritage of generation.”

Ahmad Bijan Erjilasin.

The role of Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh for Azerbaijani literature is as important as the role of Mehmet Akif, Yahya Kamal, Najib Fazil for Turkish literature. In this regard, his tumultuous poetry played a significant role in the establishment of new Azerbaijan Republic.

Yavuz Bulent Bakiler.

The poetry of Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is as precious as brilliant.

Mehmet Kaplan
Two Blind Men

There's a blind man I know: His eyes are sightless,
But he is not blind.
Though he sometimes gets scorched
in the fire of sorrows,
He does not turn a cold shoulder to his passion
And his mind.

He reads and writes day and night,
In his mind's eye he sees, feels, knows.
But there is someone else
Although he is not blind,
Nonetheless, he cannot see,
His bosom friend may die
In front of his eyes-
"I saw nothing," he says.
Whatever is good he claims as his;
He fails to see the bad.
He looks at the clock,
But can't tell what time it is.
Nothing noble
Visits his thoughts and feelings;
Often he denies he saw something,
Though he really has.
A sightless man need not be blind;
Blind is he who does not want to see.
To such an ignorant fool,
Life itself is a grave,
If you ask me.


Subjugation - Freedom

Our nation was burned in the fires of slavery,
We were wounded and scorched for the sake of freedom.

But having reached freedom in this temple,
We made our thanksgiving prayer without the Qibilah.*

Now we are free, but free from the honor we had
That once protected us from evil.
Now that we are free from the fury and anger of the enemy,
Our nation has become the target of its own hatred.

Having freed ourselves from others' subjugation,
We have succumbed to our own slavery.
We are free from benevolence and mercy,
We must reject the nation's right.
We became the brutal plunderers
Of our own Motherland.

No other nation can replace us in deception,
This one blames that one, and that one accuses this one.

While we plunder and pillage our Motherland,
We are free from the fear of Allah.
My freedom is my enemy;
Fate itself cannot make heads or tails of this secret game.

The rope that pulled me out of the deep, dry well
Is now wrapped around my neck like a noose.

* Muslims face Mecca when they pray.
Translated by Aynur Hajiyeva
Alone

I always feel alone even among people,
My days have become longer and nights come later,
When I am alone with my thoughts
Each of my thoughts becomes a friend to me.
Even the leaves of that lone tree would turn yellow,
If it didn’t have support.
I wish for the lion not to be alone,
While it is the king, sultan of forests.
If there were no fire, water could not boil in a pot.
A bird cannot fly over a mountain with a single wing.

Translated by Aynura Huseinova
Life is as Short as an Inch

Life is as short as an inch, they say
Sometimes Death brings tragedy to 100 families.
By God, in a blink of an eye,
Death is there waiting for you.
What was it like to live?
I never knew.
What is your measurement to assess life?
I've witnessed those who have lived for a century,
150 years,
And still left the world with empty heart and brain.
Do not measure life by its length,
Measure it by its depth.
There are those who confuse their right with their left,
Being respected by both,
Seeking superficial feelings.
To live a life full of meaning.
Isn't Honor what you should build your life upon?
No matter what it takes,
Or else one is really dead while being alive.
If we could live
Each day to its fullest,
We should be thankful for our fate,
And shouldn't complain about the passing of time.
I've witnessed those who lived a century, 150 years,
And still left the world with empty heart and brain.
Don't measure life by its length,
Measure it by its depth.

Translated by Aynura Huseinova

Fear

In my left hand there's an old wound -
A legacy from my childhood,
Unaware that wood burns,
I seared my hand on a piece of charcoal.
A warning hissed at me,
The sound of flesh singeing,
But I wasn't afraid,
I felt fear only when I burned my hand.
The real experience of life began with that fire.
Colorful flames from the embers
caressed my childish eyes.
I don't know why everything
I've touched since birth has burned me.
I wasn't afraid until I was burned;
I didn't know fear until I left my childish ways.
Since being burned, I'm careful when playing
with fire,
And so life begins, and continues as a habit.

American chemist Linus Pauling (1901-1994), the focus of Vahabzade's poem "Dawn," was awarded the International Lenin Prize (1970) "For Consolidating Peace Among Nations" and the distinguished honor of two Nobel Prizes, one for Chemistry (1954) for his work on chemical bonds. His second, the Nobel Peace Prize (1962), was awarded for his efforts on behalf of the nuclear test ban treaty that was signed in 1963.

During the 1950s, Pauling became a victim of the McCarthy-era "witchhunts" in the U.S. His passport was withdrawn by the State Department because his "anti-Communist statements were not strong enough." In fact, this travel restriction almost prevented him from going to his own Nobel award ceremony. Pauling was targeted because he spoke out repeatedly against official U.S. government policies during his campaign for peace, disarmament and the end of nuclear testing.

*(Addressing the U.S. government)*

You have your own position
In the line-up of governments.
You have atomic and H-bombs,
You have tanks and cannons,
You have these weapons,
You have those weapons!
Can the country that has such guns
be afraid of anything?
But you are afraid of everything even today
and yesterday, you were afraid.

One bright mind,
One worrying heart
Are more frightening to you
Than thousands of H-bombs!
You were never afraid of atomic bombs
As much as you are afraid of such thoughts
of such minds!

Why did you become afraid of one mind
Which was able to separate colored lies
from the truth,
To distinguish truth from abomination?
-I know why!
If Linus is a slanderer, if he is a liar,
Then why do you hold back what he has said
from the people?

And why are you arresting him?
(Addressing courageous ones like Linus Pauling)

You who suffer because of the Motherland,
You who don't keep silent but ever speak,
You were destined for death and jails!
(Again addressing the U.S. government)
You have atomic bombs; you have missiles,
In spite of all these weapons, you are afraid.
The heavienss of this fear
Is the weight and price
Of the harm you have done.
Look at that scarlet horizon,
It is dawn,
It is dawn!
From the personal photo-album of Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh
My Mother

She is illiterate.
She cannot write her name-my mother.
But she taught me how to count.
She taught me the names
of the months and years,
And most importantly,
She taught me language-my mother.
I tasted joy
And unhappiness
With this language.
And I created every poem
Of mine
And every melody
With this language.
Without it
I am nobody;
I am a lie.
The creator of my work,
In all its volumes and volumes,
Is my mother!
