

Folk Traditions Reflected in “The Right Hand of the Grand Master” By Konstantine Gamsakhurdia

Mariam BAKURIDZE *

Abstract

The attention paid to folklore by Konstantine Gamsakhurdia is not accidental. The author shows remarkable intuitive feel for what's valuable. He was well acquainted with the national verbal tradition and with that he once again confirms the idea that folklore is immensely important for the national literature.

Keywords: masterpiece, tradition, writer

Constantine Gamsakhurdia wrote in his Afterword of “The Right Hand of the Grand Master”:

“Rustaveli is great, no doubt ...but grand masters of Bolnisi, Jvari, Svetitskhoveli, Tsromi and Badia are to be proud of too. I was concerned about the architects of such masterpieces living in the shadow and being forgotten. Therefore, I got engaged with the beautiful legend about the severance of Constantine Arszakidze's arm.” (Gamsakhurdia, 1959, p. 813)

„I was drinking water of
Khekordzula River and
Building Mtskheta.
They captured me and
Cut of my arm
Punishing for a good building.”

Therefore, the legend about the severance of the grand master's arm (his name unknown) as the act of envy has become the main impulse for the writer's fantasy and predetermined the choice of Arszakidze as the main character.

Historians of literature are pointing at the impressive and inspiring power of folk verse used as an epigraph, which expresses the essence of the Novel. All main conflicts of the epoch are concentrated in Arszakidze's adventure. “Man's right arm holding mason's tool - décor of Svetitskhoveli wall was the basis for the artistic design of the writer. According to the legend, it must be the right arm of the Architect Konstantin Arszakidze. This opinion is supported by the well known folk verse, epigraph of the Novel.” (Zhenti, 1967, p. 55) As the personage of the novel, Konstantine Arszakidze has created magical harmony of stone from rough and coarse boulders, warmed with emotional spirit, raised up to the sky and frozen in the space, the writer has originated splendid monument of verbal art from

the “seed” hidden in the legend and four-rowed folk verse. This figurative comparison contains undeniable truth. The folk verse has preserved the impulse, which drives the essence of the novel. The writer had shown the people, who have made the history, by means of creating Arszakidze's character. This time, he was inspired by the folk poetry.

K. Gamsakhurdia uses the pagan customs and rituals with certain artistic principle.

When describing such ritual, the writer always exposes the inner world of the novel's characters. These characters represent different regions of Georgia. Locale of the characters' actions is wide. On one hand, the writer uses ethnic folklore of the highlanders' lifestyle to create the portraits of rebellious highlander Erstavli and Khevisberi and on the other hand, by means of demonstrating different customs of Eastern and Western lowlands of Georgia, he creates the portrait of King George, Arszakidze and other characters.

King George and his friends are attending the Icon Celebration event for intelligence purposes. The elder man bestows his blessing upon the lamb brought by the King: “God bless your power, Saint George, this is for your victory!” If we compare the text of this glorification with ethnographic sources, we will have the following description: “God gives you victory George... Take pity on those who ask for... Have mercy for those who hope for... Glory to the Sun and the Angel as great as the Sun... Cover them with the hem of your gown and protect from the enemy and painful death.” (Umikashvili, 1964, p. 183)

Along with the pagan ritual, common in Pshavkhevsureti, the writer describes the customs (well known in Lazika), connected with the Flower Masters, and thoroughly fulfilled Arszakidze.

King George (Glakhua) and his friends are hunting. Gabriel refers to the oak in a big forest, describing

* Associate professor, Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia
E-mail: mbakuridze@ibsu.edu.ge

what he had seen a week ago. "Young boy decorated with red and yellow flowers had stepped out with a rooster under his arm. He had walked around the oak tree three times and kissed it three times. Afterwards, he had beheaded the rooster, spilled blood around the oak, taken the rooster and disappeared into the woods." (Sikharulidze, 1964, p. 549) After this conversation, the disguised hunters met Arsakidze himself. Estatey had recognized Arsakidze and asked for the purpose of beheading the rooster under the oak tree.

"I had the chicken pox last week and therefore sacrificed red rooster for the idol." The rooster is considered as holy bird, mediator between the human and the idol. It is connected with the worship of sun and moon. "It is the only one among the animals that always looking up...always competing with the God and always awake." (Gamsakhurdia, 1959, p. 571)

In "The Right Hand of the Grand Master" one can find the reminiscences of the Meziri Cult and "Taboo", in particular, when characterizing Farsman the Persian and describing Rati's neglected palace, where scorpions were bred instead of humans. "They say Parsman is riding the snake around Aragvi groves." (Gamsakhurdia, 1959, p. 467)

Parsman prepares different poisons from a snake. He dabs this poison on the legendary Dzelitskhoveli (living beam) and kills Mamamze Eristavi's son Chiaber. The legend about this very Dzelitskhoveli is confirmed in the novel. "According to the legends, it was made from the wood of Svetitsxoveli (living pillar) during the epoch, when the Christianity has adopted the pagan cult of a sacred tree." (Gamsakhurdia, 1959, p. 500)

With great skill the writer revives and renews the old traditions of loud mourning, fencing and sworn brotherhood.

King George (Glakhua), who had come to the Icon Celebration under cover, was bravely fencing with Kalundauri. After the match he had offered sworn brotherhood to Kalundauri:

"The elder approached and trimmed silver shavings into the horn full of beer. Kalundauri drank it and passed it to his sworn brother."

In "The Right Hand of the Grand Master" Pshavkhevsurian tradition of lamentation had been renewed and interpreted artistically. Pkhovi natives were mourning about the tragic death of Chiaber Eristavi.

"On the second day after Chiaber's death, Mamamze Eristavi sent black messengers to his friends and well-wishers. The first messenger, bearing Chiaber's shield and chainmail, was sent to Kvetara". (Gamsakhurdia, 1959, p. 502)

Takha, hailing from Ossetia, embraces the horse. "No longer have you a rider, without you has he ventured into the blackness, how shall he split the dark in twine without you, how shall he swing his sword without you, how shall he smite his foe without you, grief is upon you! Steed, no longer have you a master, grief is upon you, steed no longer have you the hero Chiaber". (Sikharulidze, 1964, p. 502) K.S. Sikharulidze

discusses in depth this mourning scene from "Grandmaster's Right Hand" and concludes that "the mourning of Chiaber is one of the most powerful episodes in the book." (Sikharulidze, 1964, p. 26)

The lament about past life of the departed, specific for the obituary poetry is employed here. This original lament creates the frame of mind of King George and therefore, it has certain esthetic function.

Svetitskhoveli "confronts the eternity" and demands sacrifice of everything from the great master. Arsakidze is ready to obey. "Sweetheart had kneeled three times and begged for the great master's soul. Tears "rained down" from Arsakidze's eyes. He could not give his soul to his sweetheart because he had sacrificed it for Svetitskhoveli."

These words expose Arsakidze's main feature, which determines the artistic image of the novel's main personage.

The difficulties wrought by earthquakes and weather were hindering the end of construction of Svetitskhoveli. Added to that was the immense sadness brought about by his unfortunate love of Shorena, which lay heavy on the heart of the Grand Master. Confounded Arsakidze is lifted out of his difficult condition by a love-verse sung by a red-haired Laz playing his fanduri "Arsakidze has heard this verse as a youth, although he could hardly tell apart the Lazian words sung to the sounds of fanduri".

"Sea is the color of your eyes and
you yourself look like the sea.
If you do not pity me and
marry someone else,
in spring I'll
stop sowing and plowing,
I'll cross the flooded
Tshorokhi and Mtkvari.
I'll give your homestead to the flame,
and your love – to the wind,
and I'll kill and your beloved husband
You traitor,
Sea is the color of your eyes and
you yourself look like the sea." (Gamsakhurdia,
1959, p. 735)

"With the description of this rather interesting scene, the writer let us peer into the hearts of people suffering from plagueaned the perplexed soul of Arsakidze, who is smitten by his love for Shorena. With the help of this fanduri player, he portrays the role of folk singers in the lives of working people." (Sikharulidze, 1964, p. 25)

The writer also pauses with the blessings that are popular in the city folklore, and belong to the so called Karachoghelis. These are toasts directed at male salmon, stag and ox-deer, pronounce by the attendants of King (Glakhua) undercover.

"God bless that male salmon which, tonight, shall swim up Aragvi's stream, searching cliff falls for his mate, braving waves in order to catch up with her in Gudamakari and reach his goal." (Gamsakhurdia,

1959, p. 612) This book confirms the claim about the importance of folklore in a national literature.

References

Gamsakhurdia, K. (1959). *Selected Stories*. Tbilisi, Georgia: Sabchota Sakartvelo

Sikharulidze, Qs. (1964). *Essays*. Tbilisi, Georgia: Tbilisi State University

Umikashvili, P. (1964). *Krestomatia*. Tbilisi, Georgia: Mecniereba

Zhenti, B. (1967). *Constantine Gamsakhurdia*. Tbilisi, Georgia: Mecniereba