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The Life and Poetry of Gulrukhsor Safieva: A Quest for Tajik Identity

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Introduction

This article has two objectives. It casts a look at the life and creative contributions of the Tajik poetess Gulrukhsor Safieva, as well as shows how Safieva, in an Islamic milieu suffused with socialist values, bypassed those ideologies and gravitated towards the cultural and spiritual values of her ancient ancestors. The first part of the article discusses Safieva's early life and education in her village, followed by her graduation from the university and acquaintance with several major Soviet and Iranian authors who shaped her worldview. During the Tajik Civil War (1992–1997), sympathizing with the Islamists, she showed her disdain for the Russian occupiers by writing incendiary poems. After five years living in Bishkek and Moscow, she returned to Tajikistan with her faith in the good will of the Russians restored.

The second part explores how Safieva's search for her own identity begins in her village and shifts from her village to her country. A review of her life under communism and Islam is followed by examination of how she became focused on the land of the ancient Aryans.¹ The section begins with a look at Tajik literature, including Safieva's poetry, her studies, her use of literary devices, and her works of fiction. The study of literature is followed by an extensive exposition of Safieva's poetry and its role in the development of her view of Tajik identity. Here, her poetry is centred on the core of Tajik identity which itself

is buttressed by several factors such as the Tajiki language, the treatment of women, and Nawrūz.



Figure 1: Portrait of Gulrukhsor Safieva

Life and Education

Safieva, orphaned at an early age, was born in the village of Yakhch, in Komsomolobod, on December 17, 1947, to the family of an agronomist.² She attended a traditional rural school and a boarding school in the Komsomolobod (now Nurobod) district. She published her first poem in Soviet Qarotegin, at the age of twelve. In 1963, Safieva moved to Dushanbe and, in 1968, graduated from Tajikistan State University with a degree in Persian language and literature. At the same time, she joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Subsequently, she led the Javononi Tojikiston (Young Tajiks) group,³ became the head of the press sector of the Komsomoli Tojikiston and, eventually, its Secretary of the Board.

Professional and Creative Activity

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was significant in the formation of Safieva's career because, as a Komsomol, she met Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008; the most well-known Kyrgyz author who wrote both in Russian and Kyrgyz languages),⁴ and Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–1984). She also

¹Noble Indo-Iranian people, created the Rig Veda and the Avesta, considered to be the ancient ancestors of the Tajiks.

²Abdurahmon Abdumannonov, "Gulrukhsor" [Gulrukhsor], in *Entsiklopediyai Adabiyot va San'ati Tojik* [Encyclopedia of Tajik Literature and Art] (Dushanbe: Chief editorial board of the Tajik Soviet encyclopedia of science, 1988), 2:371.

³A branch of the All-Union Leninist Communist League.

⁴Iraj Bashiri, "Chingiz Aitmatov: Life and Works," *EurasiaCritic*, July 2008, 74–79. Article available at https://www.academia.edu/7870749/Chingiz_Aitmatov_Life_and_Works.

⁵Noted Afghan poet, adopted Iran's Nima-style shi'r-i naw in his compositions.

⁶Style of writing fiction in the former Soviet Union, depicts everyday activities and experiences in a simple language without passing judgment.

⁶Iraj Bashiri, "The Art of Chingiz Aitmatov's Stories," Working Paper, 2004. Available at https://www.academia.edu/8113745/The_Art_of_Chingiz_Aitmatovs_Stories.

⁷Iraj Bashiri, "The Art of Chingiz Aitmatov's Stories," Working Paper, 2004. Available at https://www.academia.edu/8113745/The_Art_of_Chingiz_Aitmatovs_Stories.

⁸All transliterations and translations are made by Iraj Bashiri.

⁹First Secretary of the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1964.

participated in the first Symposium of Persian Poetry held in Dushanbe on December 27–28, 1968. Participants included Parvīz Nātil Khānlārī (1292–1369/1914–1990), Ghulām Husayn Yūsifī (1306–1369/1928–1991), Nādir Nādirpūr (1308–1378/1929–2000), Lutf'alī Sūratgar (1279–1348/1900–1969), Najīb Māyil Hiravī (1329/1950–), and Khalīl Allāh Khalīlī (1286–1366/1907–1987).⁵ The topic concerned theoretical and scientific aspects of shi'r-i naw (new poetry).

Seeing the various genres of Persian poetry at work, Safieva synthesized traditional and modernist styles and presented a style unique unto herself. Meeting with Aitmatov and reading his works was also significant. In the 1960s, using realist fiction⁶ in works like *Jamila*, Aitmatov discussed the shortcomings of the Soviet system openly and forcefully.⁷ Gulrukhsor used the same technique, with a modicum of humor, in *Zanoni Sabzbahor* (The Sabzbahor women).⁸

An Energetic Start

After Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971),⁹ came to power and loosened the grip of Moscow on the republics, Safieva found an opportunity to express her sentiments about matters closer to her heart. Her *Bunafsha* (Violet) was written under those circumstances. Boqi Rahimzoda (1910–1980) wrote the introduction. During the next two years, she edited *Masha'al* (1970–1972), joined the Union of Writers of the Soviet Union as well as the Union of Writers of Tajikistan. Between 1972 and 1981, she was the Chief Editor of *Pioniri Tojikiston*.

In 1973, Safieva's *Khonai Padar* (Father's house) won the Literary Tajik Youths Prize. In *Dostoni Komsomol* (The Komsomol story), about the establishment and contributions of the Lenin Komsomol, her character lived in accordance with Party doctrine (i.e., avoided smoking, drinking, religion, and discussion of politics). Her poetic essay "Shabdarav" (Night harvest) deals with the contributions of women and old men behind the front



in World War II in a far-off part of Tajikistan. In those works, and in Afsonai kuhi (Mountain legend), she uses realist fiction to expose the shortcomings of the Soviet system. Safieva was appointed Vice-Director of the Union of Writers of Tajikistan, a position she held between 1981 and 1985. In 1989, she became a member of the USSR parliament.

Influences on Safieva's Craft

The early influences on Safieva's poetry were exerted by her professors, especially Professor B. Rahimzoda, who foresaw a bright future for the poetess.¹⁰ In 1990, in West Germany, Safieva met with Mehdi Akhavan Sales (1306–1369/1921–1990),¹¹ Mahmūd Dawlatābādī (1319/1940–),¹² Hūshang Gulshīrī (1316–1379/1938–2000),¹³ Buzurg 'Alavī (1282–1375/1904–1997),¹⁴ and Muhammad Rizā Shaft'ī Kadkanī (1318/1939–).¹⁵ The meeting with those Iranian modernist poets contributed to the development of Safieva's self-awareness in several ways. From Akhavan Sales she learned independence and the use of enigmatic concepts. Akhavan uses the phrase *zulmat-i nuh tū* (the darkness created by the nine companions of the sun), which to understand, one must explore the solar system.¹⁶ Safieva creates *zani mardonramon* (woman that makes men recoil) which to visualize, one must imagine the moment when a flock of sheep encounters a wolf. The flock stops short, pulls back, and runs. Safieva intimates that upon seeing her heroine, men follow the example of the sheep.¹⁷ By talking to the other participants she became aware that she, too, belonged to the ancient Sogdian culture.¹⁸ More importantly, she realized that the Sogdians, like the Iranians, belonged to the ancient Aryan culture. In other words, through understanding the relationship between her Iranian and Sogdian cultures, she discovered her eternal Aryan roots. This belief was of great importance later in her search for identity. Most importantly, she came to realize that what thus far she had been creating as realist fiction (i.e., the product of using a literary device to depict the workings of the Soviet system), was not, in fact, fictitious at all. Furthermore, she realized that

¹⁰Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Bunafsha [Violet]* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1970), 3.

¹¹Pioneer of writing Free Verse in Iran.

¹²Iranian realist writer, well known for his promotion of social and artistic freedom in Iran and for depiction of rural life of the country through his personal experiences.

¹³One of the most influential writers of Persian prose, especially among those using modern literary techniques.

¹⁴Intellectual, and a founding member of the communist Tudeh Party of Iran.

¹⁵Well-known literary figure, especially in the area of literary criticism.

¹⁶Iraj Bashiri, "Winter by Mehdi Akhavan Sales translated by Iraj Bashiri," Working Paper, 2001, 2003, 2023. Available at https://www.academia.edu/8146429/Winter_by_Mehdi_Akhavan_Sales_translated_by_Iraj_Bashiri.

¹⁷Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Ruhi bokhtar: She'rho va dostonho [The spirit of the West: Poems and stories]* (Dushanbe: Adib, 1987), 5.

¹⁸An ancient Silk Road people with great influence on the art and trade of Central Asia. They lived in Soghd (also referred to as Sogdia or Sogdiana) and were considered to be the ancestors of the Tajiks.

¹⁹Umeda Rahimjonovna Abdurashidova, "Zaminahoi fa'oliyati ijodii Gulruksor Safieva" [Grounds for the organization of the creative activity of Gulruksor Safieva], in *Kursi takhasussi az jarayoni adabii davr: Gulruksor va she'ri mu'osiri Tojiki* [Specialized Course on Current Literary Era: Gulruksor and Contemporary Tajik Poetry] (Khujand: Nur-i Ma'rifat, 2017), 131. Available at <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/grounds-of-the-development-of-creative-activities-of-gulruksor-safieva>.

²⁰Organized massacre of particular ethnic groups, in this case permanent Russian residents of Tajikistan.

²¹Gulruksor Safieva, *Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār-i Gulruksār* [Collection of poems of Gulruksor], intr. Simin Behbahani (Tehran: Nigāh, 1394/2017), 423.

²²Ibrāhīm Khudāyār and 'Ātifah Hūman, "Tahlil va sūratbandī-yi rumantizm-i ijtimā'i dar shi'r-i Gulruksār Safiyivā" [Analysis of formulation of Romanticism in the poetry of Gulruksor Safieva], *Shi'r-i Pazhūhishī* [Research Poem] 14, no. 4 (Isfand 1401/ March 2023): 40–41.

²³Safieva, *Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār*, 121–2.

²⁴Member of the far-left faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labor Party.

the characters that she depicts, rather than being figments of her imagination, are real individual human beings like herself, in dire circumstances coping with real life and death situations. This realization speeded up her departure from Soviet values and gravitation, both in her poetry and speeches, to Islam and, eventually, to Aryan culture. Finally, the influence of Chingiz Aitmatov on Gulruksor was considerable. It changed her worldview and her poetic diction. Aitmatov recognized the poetess as a poet belonging to the tradition of eminent Tajik bards like Firdawsī and Rūdakī. He even wrote the foreword to Safieva's *Zerkalo dnya* (The mirror of the day).¹⁹

Disenchantment with the Soviet System

Between 1990 and 1992, Safieva was the founder and editor of the journal *Farhang*. In 1991, at the height of her career, she left the USSR parliament and participated in a hunger strike in Dushanbe, protesting the Tajik Parliament's lack of respect for the law. At this time, her poetry assumed an anti-Soviet, especially anti-Russian, stance. This change happened at a time when Russians living in Tajikistan were victims of pogroms,²⁰ kidnapping, and murder. In the poem "Tuti talkh" (Bitter berry),²¹ she mocked the Great Patriotic War for which the Tajiks paid a heavy toll. She held those who mistook hell for a make-believe paradise (i.e., the Soviets) responsible for the destruction of her culture.²² In the poem "Rasvoi vafoi vatan" (Ashamed of loyalty to the country),²³ she referred to Bolshevik²⁴ society as a botloqi gandida (cesspool) with no recourse to the sea, and a deceitful mirage.²⁵ In the poem "Guli nor" (Pomegranate flower),²⁶ she referred to the Bolsheviks as a khor (thorn), aghyor (enemies), and bior (shameless).²⁷ However, by 1992, as the socio-economic situation of the republic worsened and the intellectuals, scientists, and literary figures became targets of ethnic cleansing, Safieva's situation became precarious.

Recall that Safieva grew up as a Muslim Tajik, in a Soviet environment in various orphanages. In later life, she advanced to



high political status within the Soviet system. At the start of the civil war in Tajikistan, she changed sides and moved towards the Islamic opposition. The Islamic opposition, on the other hand, had fought against the Soviet system during those same decades, at times in bloody conflicts. Thus, the opposition leaders did not consider Safieva's move into their camp veritable. Therefore, when they issued orders to kill all Russophile Tajik intellectuals, Safieva's name was on the top of their list. When the time to execute the order arrived, Safieva pleaded with the executioners. How can you kill me, she asked the militants, if my poems are memorized at schools? Her plea reminded one of her executioners of a photograph of her in an old textbook. She was spared.²⁸



Figure 2: From right: Shafi'i Kadkani, Gulrukhsor Safieva, Bozor Alavi, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Hushang Golshiri, Berlin, 1969.

Life in Exile

After the incident in which militants spared her life, the Russian military moved Safieva to Russia.²⁹ In Moscow, Russian intellectuals who had heard Safieva's anti-Russian poems back in Dushanbe, mocked her. One should not spit in the "Russian well" from which one will have to drink later, they said.³⁰ What they were referring to were statements like "My beautiful dark-eyed Motherland [was] desecrated by the northern barbarians," threats such as, "The hour of reckoning has come," and disre-

²⁸Khudāyār and Hūman, "Tahlil va sūratbandī-yi rumanfīsm-i ijtimā'i dar shi'r-i Gulrukhsār Safiyāvā," 40.

²⁶Safieva, Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār, 125.

²⁷Khudāyār and Hūman, "Tahlil va sūratbandī-yi rumanfīsm-i ijtimā'i dar shi'r-i Gulrukhsār Safiyāvā," 40.

²⁸Yadviga Yuferova, "Moī drug iz SSSR: narodnaya poetessa iz Tadjikistana Gulrukhsor Safieva" [My friend from the USSR, the poetess Golrokh-sor Safieva] (Moscow: Book House, 1986). Available at <https://rg.ru/2022/12/04/ona-uvela-hajjama-iz-kabaka.html>.

²⁹Levi Juden, "Severnīye varvāry oskvernili moī Tadjikistan" – poetessa Safieva teper' zhivshchaya v Moskve" [Northern barbarians desecrated my Tajikistan – poetess Safieva now living in Moscow], Pikabu Press, September 9, 2019. Available at https://pikabu.ru/story/severnīye_varvāry_oskvernili_moy_tadjikistan_poyetessa_safieva_teper_zhivushchaya_v_moskve_6919385.

³⁰Juden, "Severnīye varvāry oskvernili moī Tadjikistan"."

³¹Igor Panin, "Devochki Byvayut Raznye Osobenno Tadzhitskiye" ["Girls are different, especially Tajik girls"], LiveJournal, December 19, 2008. Available at <https://igor-panin.livejournal.com/26685.html>.

³²Yadвига Yuferova, "Poët po chrezvychnym porucheniim" [Poet on emergency assignments], *Gazeta 4234* (Russia), November 28, 2006.

³³Circle reminiscent of poets like Boris Pasternak and writers like Komey Chukovsky who lived in Peredelkino.

³⁴Juden, ""Severnnye varvary oskvenili moi Tadzhiestan"".

³⁵Yuferova, "Moï drug iz SSSR."

³⁶Telekhov M. Wolf pack. "The murder of a nine-year-old girl shocked St. Petersburg," Archived copy of September 24, 2010 on the Wayback Machine, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 11, 2004. Available at https://tonyrogers.com/news/st_pete_stabbing.htm.

³⁷Ibrāhīm Khudāyār, "Dukhtar-i Zāyandah Rūd" [Daughter of the Zayandehrud], *Ittilā'āt* 27058 1372/1993, 6.

³⁸Yuferova, "Moï drug iz SSSR."

spectful statements like, "Let the blood wash away the Russian dirt."³¹ Nevertheless, Safieva lived in Russia and participated in the public life of the Russian Federation.³² In fact, with the assistance of the Peredelkino³³ poets, she created the International Academy of Poetry, a main feature of which was the publication of a volume on 'Umar Khayyām's Quatrains. For that volume, she was distinguished as "One of the most insightful researchers of the work of 'Umar Khayyām."³⁴

Post-War Days

In 1996, Safieva received the Republic Komsomol Lenin Prize. She also became the head of the Khazinai Madaniyati Tojikiston (The Repository of the Cultural Treasures of Tajikistan). In addition, she published *Dunyoï Dil* (The universe of the heart) and garnered the more prestigious Soviet Komsomol Lenin Prize. Gulruksor returned to her homeland in 1997, a different individual.³⁵ As the *Modari Millat* (Mother of the nation), she tried to persuade those who continued to stoke the unrest to leave the scene and allow the people of Tajikistan to shape their own destiny. There was also a great shift in her attitude regarding Russia. In 2004, commenting on the murder of Khursheda Sultonova, she noted, "when the war was going on in Tajikistan, I and many of my compatriots were sheltered, Russia helped us to survive."³⁶ In 1999, she earned the coveted title of the Peoples Poet of Tajikistan.³⁷

Since her return from Russia, Safieva has organized her poetry in various collections and published them in Russia and Iran. A good portion of her time was spent on writing and rewriting a voluminous novel called *Sakarot* (Agony). In 2022, for her study of the Quatrains of Omar Khayyam, Safieva was made a permanent member of Iran's Academy of Persian Language and Literature.³⁸ Safieva's poems are translated into many languages, especially Farsi and Russian. In addition, she has written a number of poems in Russian, as well as contributed several plays.



Selected Publications

Poems

Bunafsha (Violet), Dushanbe: Irfon, 1970.

Khonai Padar (Father's house), Dushanbe: Irfon, 1973.

Afsonai Kuhi (Mountain legend), Dushanbe: Ma'orif, 1975.

Ikhlos (Sincerity), Dushanbe: Ma'orif, 1980.

Otashi Sughd (The Sughd fire), Dushanbe: Irfon, 1981.

Takhti Sangin (Stone throne), Dushanbe: Adib, 1992.

Marzi Nomus (The boundary of honor), Sadoi Sharq 1–2, 1988.

Devoni Gulrukhsor (Gulrukhsor's collection of poems), Dushanbe, Payvand, 2006.

Novels

Zanoni Sabzbahor (The women of Sabzbahar), Dushanbe: Adib, 1989.

Zan va Jang (Woman and war), Dushanbe: Matbu'ot, 2001.

Sakarot (Agony), Dushanbe: Er-graf, 2009.

Poetic Essays

Shabdarav (Harvest night), Dushanbe: Irfon, 1975.

Dunyoii Dil (The universe of the heart), Dushanbe: Irfon, 1977.

Ruhi Bokhtar: She'rho va Dostonho (The spirit of the West:

³⁹Zoroastrianism (same as Mazdaism and Behdin) is an ancient Iranian religion based on the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster.

⁴⁰The Safavids ruled Iran from 1501 to 1736, made Shi'ism the official religion of Iran.

⁴¹The second largest branch of Islam encompassing 10 to 15 percent of the Muslims of the world, has its own principles and rituals.

⁴²The predominant sect in Islam with followers throughout the world, follows Shari'a law.

⁴³Iraj Bashiri, "Sadriiddin Aini," in *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (Farmington Hills, MI: St. James Press, 1999), 27.

⁴⁴Iraj Bashiri, "Lahuti, Abulqosim," in *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Askarali Rajabov (Dushanbe: The International Borbad Foundation, 2003), 172.

⁴⁵Iraj Bashiri, "Ghano'at, Mu'min," in *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (Farmington Hills, MI: St. James Press, 1999), 618.

⁴⁶Bozor Sobir is well known for his poetic style, especially imagery, and for his patriotism. He used Gorbachev's reforms as a platform for promoting his own extreme political views.

Poems and stories), Dushanbe: Adib, 1987.

Studies

"Foklori Qarotegin" (The folklore of Karotegin), Dushanbe, 1984.

Ashki Qatrai Boron (The tear of a raindrop), Sovershenno Sekretno, 2002.

Tajik Literature

Over the centuries, the literatures of Tajikistan and Iran shared the same history. Differences occurred when, in the seventh century, Islam imposed a new ideology on the conquered Zoroastrian³⁹ population of Iran. After the division of Islam into Shi'a and Sunni under the Safavids,⁴⁰ Shi'ism⁴¹ became the official religion of Iran. The Tajiks maintained their Sunni⁴² faith and safeguarded the integrity of their language. Subsequent differences occurred in the twentieth century, when Westernization and Sovietization impacted Iran and Tajikistan, respectively. Using her poetry, Safieva navigates the literature and culture of ancient Iran in search of Tajik national identity.

During the Soviet era, Tajik poetry experienced three phases: 1) between 1930 and 1960, poets like Sadriiddin 'Aini (1878–1954),⁴³ Abū al-Qāsim Lahūtī (1887–1957),⁴⁴ and their followers, retained the literary form of classical Persian poetry. To satisfy the demands of their socialist readers, they colored their contents with patriotic themes. 2) Between 1960 and 1985, poets like Mu'min Ghano'at (1923–2018),⁴⁵ Bozor Sobir (1938–2018),⁴⁶ Laiq Sherali (1941–2000),⁴⁷ and Gulrukhsor Safieva (1947–) introduced innovations in form and content, and advocated a need for reevaluation of Tajik history and culture. 3) During the era of perestroika⁴⁸ and glasnost,⁴⁹ the younger generation, following Iranian and Russian contemporary trends, expanded and updated their craft.⁵⁰ Subsequent familiarity with



Iran's shi'r-i naw has made Tajik poetry a viable vehicle.⁵¹



Figure 3: Right: Book cover of Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Majmu'e-ye Ash'ar-e Golrukhsar* [Collection of Poems of Gulrukhsor], Introduction by Simin Behbahani, (Tehran: Negah, 2017) left: Simin Behbahani and Gulrukhsor Safieva

Safieva's Poetry

Before Safieva's era, Tajik poetry was dominated by Mirsa'id Mirshakar (1912–1993) and Mirzo Tursunzoda (1911–1977). Mirshakar covered issues regarding the Tajiks' struggle to build a new life and the harms that religion inflicted on people.⁵² Tursunzoda promoted the Communist International.⁵³ Ozod Aminova (1933–2009),⁵⁴ whom Safieva emulated, wrote on patriotism, love, loyalty, and the good life of the Soviet woman. In *Zanoni Sabzbahor*, Safieva discusses love, loyalty, and the hard life of the women of Kuhiston.⁵⁵ Safieva also emulated Mu'min Ghano'at, who sought a new approach for improving the language of Tajik poetry; Bozor Sobir, who refused Soviet cultural limitations, and who used the experiences of Iranian poets (e.g., Nima, Sales) to move Tajik poetry away from the classical 'arūz (prosody) into the domain of new poetry; and Loiqli SHERALI, who considered poetic value, consisting of image, meaning, and poetic content, to be more significant than form. Combining the thoughts of her contemporaries, including modernist Iranian poets, Safieva's poetry reveals the meaning of being a human and dramatizes the centrality of thought and feeling.⁵⁶ With her new style, Safieva was a groundbreaker recognized by her con-

⁴⁷Iraj Bashiri, "Sheraliev, Loiqli," in *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Askarali Rajabov, (Dushanbe: The International Borbad Foundation, 2003), 320.

⁴⁸Political reform within the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

⁴⁹Policy of wider dissemination of information in the Soviet Union.

⁵⁰Cf., Mīrzā Shukūrzādah, *Tājīkīstān dar mas'ir-i tārikh* [Tajikistan on the path of history] (Tehran: al-Hudā, 2006), 13.

⁵¹Umeda Rahimjonovna Abdurashidova, "Tafsiri Badii Vatan va Millat dar Davrai Avvali Ijodiyoti Gulrukhsor" ["Interpretation of nation and people in the early period of Gulrukhsor's creativity"].

⁵²Iraj Bashiri, "Mirshakar, Mirsa'id," in *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Askarali Rajabov (Dushanbe: The International Borbad Foundation, 2003), 190–1.

⁵³Iraj Bashiri, "Tursunzoda, Mirzo," in *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Askarali Rajabov (Dushanbe: The International Borbad Foundation, 2003), 354–5.

⁵⁴Iraj Bashiri, "Aminova, Ozod," in *Prominent Tajik Figures of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Askarali Rajabov (Dushanbe: The International Borbad Foundation, 2003), 32–33.

⁵⁵The highland areas of Tajikistan.

⁵⁶Cf., Mohammadjon Shokurov, "Adabiyoti Tojiki" ["Tajik Literature"], in *Encyclopedia Adabiyot va San'ati Tojik* [Encyclopedia of Tajik Literature and Art](Dushanbe: Chief Editorial Board of the Tajik Soviet Encyclopedia of Science, 1988), 1:97; see also Asghar Dadbeh, *The Great Islamic Encyclopedia* (Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2006), 14:271.

⁵⁷Abdurashidova, "Zaminahoi tashakkuli fa'oliyati ijodii Gulrukhsor Safieva," 131.

⁵⁸Abdurashidova, "Zaminahoi tashakkuli fa'oliyati ijodii Gulrukhsor Safieva," 131.

⁵⁹Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Devoni Ishq u Khandah* [Collection of poetry on tears and laughter] (Dushanbe: Payvand, 2004), 46.

⁶⁰For a comprehensive study of Safieva's contributions, see Khodanazar Asozoda, *Adabiyoti tojik dar sadai bist* [Tajik Literature in the 20th Century] (Dushanbe: Ma'rifat, 1999) and *Matluba Mirzoyunus, Hamzodi tufon* [Born with the storm] (Dushanbe: Adib, 2007). *Hamzodi tufon* is also translated as *Tufon's Twin*.

⁶¹Iraj Bashiri, *The Fiction of Sadeq Hedayat* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1984), 22.

⁶²Yuferova, "Mo'i drug iz SSSR."

⁶³Alī Asghar Shi'rdūst, "Ta'sir-i shi'r-i Irān bar shi'r-i mu'āsir-i Tājīkistān" [The influence of Iranian poetry on contemporary poetry of Tajik-

temporaries as the poet of national consciousness.⁵⁷ During the late 1980s, she entered the political arena and during the civil war, which devastated Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997, she was referred to as the poet of resistance.⁵⁸ Her poetry recognizes the very essence of humanity.⁵⁹ Her mentors praise her poetry and her dedication to Tajik literature and culture. In particular, Asozoda gives perspective to her poetry. Mirzoyunus discusses her early life in *Yakhch*.⁶⁰

Safieva's Studies

Safieva has two studies. In *Folklori Qarotegin*, she presents the folk songs, folk stories, children's songs, parables, and the overall rustic customs of Qarotegin. In *Ashki Qatrai Boron*, she echoes the thoughts of the Iranian author Sadeq Hedayat (1903–1951) who says that not all the quatrains attributed to Khayyām are his. Based on Khayyām's philosophy, Hedayat states that out of 200 to 400 quatrains attributed to Khayyām, fourteen can be attributed to Khayyām with certainty.⁶¹ Safieva believes that out of 5,000 quatrains attributed to Khayyām, 350 belong to him. Furthermore, Safieva believes that Fitzgerald did a good thing translating the *Ruboiyot* (Quatrains), but also did a disservice. Fitzgerald wrote his own poetry imitating Khayyām, she says, and his approach paved the way for amateurish folklorists to amplify the Quatrains.⁶²

Genre in Safieva's Poetry

It is not easy to determine to which genre Gulrukhsor's poetry belongs. 'Alī Asghar Shi'rdūst believes that "[Gulrukhsor] restructures the *masnavī* to achieve the impact of the poetry of Nima Yushij."⁶³ In other words, Safieva's poems are written in *bahr-i Ramal*⁶⁴ or *bahr-i Hazaj*,⁶⁵ but manipulated to appear as *shi'r-i naw*.⁶⁶ Simin Behbahani (1927-2014)⁶⁷ says, "Gulrukhsor's poetry does not belong to the *ghazal* (sonnet) or *qasīdah* (odes) genres, nor does it fit the *rubā'ī* (quatrain), *qit'ah* (stanza), *masnavī*, or *musammat* genres. Neither is it *shi'r-i naw* in



the tradition of Nima. Rather,” she says, “Safieva synthesizes all the genres into one, her own unique genre.”⁶⁸ Behbahani attributes the accessibility of Safieva’s poetry and the excitement it creates in the mind of the reader directly to this unique, innovative style, as well as her use of such archaic words as *nofor* (uncomfortable), *pazmon* (longing), *dastarkhon* (tablecloth), *dodar* (younger brother), and *zhakon* (grumble).⁶⁹

Literary Devices Used by Safieva

Safieva uses simile, metaphor, contradiction, pun, refrain, and *ṭhām* (ambiguity). In the poem “*Taronai Huzn*” (Song of grief), she repeats the refrain “*Man gham namekhvuram/Gham mekhvurad marā*” (I don’t grieve/Grief eats away at me) four times.⁷⁰

Today, too, ended

Like a breath,

My heyday ended

Without any love,

Weeping while laughing

Beautiful yet ephemeral,

I don’t grieve

Grief eats away at me.⁷¹

Additionally, she enhances the impact of that refrain with a pun. In the first part of the refrain, the noun *gham* (sorrow) and the auxiliary verb *khvurdan* (i.e., *gham khvurdan*) form a compound verb meaning “to grieve.” In the second part, *khvurdan* is used in its literal meaning of “to eat.” So, the literal translation is “I do not eat grief/Grief eats me.”

istan”], *Īrān Shinākht* 3, no. 4 (1376/1997). Masnavī refers to poetry composed of distiches corresponding in measure, each consisting of a pair of rhymes.

⁶⁸Name of a poetic meter in which *fā’ilātun* is repeated four times.

⁶⁹Name of a poetic meter in which *mafā’ilun* is repeated four times.

⁷⁰Style of poetry in Iran popularized by Nima Yushij (1276–1338/1895–1960) early in the twentieth century.

⁷¹Prominent Iranian contemporary poetess, lyricist, and activist.

⁶⁸Safieva, *Majmū’ah-yi ashā’r*, 15–17. *Musammāt* refers to a poem in which the rhyme of one line is different from all the rest.

⁶⁹Safieva, *Majmū’ah-yi ashā’r*, 16.

⁷⁰Ghulam’abbās Nafīsī, et al., “*Shūr-i vatankhvāhī dar surūdāh’ḥā-yi Gulrukhshār Safiyivā, shā’ir-i mu’āsir-i Tājik*” [Patriotic zeal in the poetic works of the Tajik poetess Gulrukhshār Safieva], *Faslnāmah-yi ‘Ilmī-yi Tafīsīr va Tahfīl-i Mutūn-i Zabān va Adabiyāt-i Fārsī* [Scientific Journal on Interpretation and Analysis of Persian Language and Literature], 13, no. 50 (1400/2000):395–422.

⁷¹Gulrukhshār Safieva, *Taronai Huzn* [Song of grief], trans. Mīrzā Shākūrzādāh (Tehran, al-Hudā, 1373/1995), 72–74.

⁷¹Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Taronai Huzn* [Song of grief], trans. Mirzā Shakūrzādah (Tehran, al-Hudā, 1373/1995), 72–74.

⁷²Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash'ār-i Gulrukhsār Safiyivā* (Collection of the poetry of Gulrukhsor Safieva), trans. Mirzā Shakūrzādah (Tehran: al-Hudā, 1373/1995), 75–77.

⁷³Nafīsī et al., “Shūr-i vatankh-vāhī,” 417.

Safieva’s use of ambiguity is more involved in the poem “Taronai Bekhobi” (Song of insomnia), where she says:

In the bud of my lips,

A hundred autumnal kisses.

In the snow of my eye,

Light sprinkles flowers.

In the eye of my needle,

A world is lodged.

I can’t go to sleep.⁷²

In “barfi dida” (the snow of my eye), she might be using snow to indicate clarity of vision, or she might mean blindness (i.e., eyes turned white). Similarly, one can read the combination *chashm* and *suzan* either as meaning the “eye of the needle” or as a “needle inserted in the eye.” The refrain “*khobam namebarad*” (I can’t go to sleep) is repeated six times.⁷³

Gulrukhsor’s Fiction

In addition to poetry, Gulrukhsor has several works of fiction. The themes prevalent in her fiction are the advantages of peace, weakness of the masses, ruthlessness of the mighty, respect for justice, purity, and loyalty, as well as avoidance of hypocrisy and hatred.

Her *Dostoni Komsomol* is devoted to the history of the formation and the heroic struggles of the Leninist youth union during the Soviet era. Her *Zanoni Sabzbahor* highlights the heart-wrenching difficulties of a *Kuhistoni* girl. Using her experience and knowledge of the rich folklore of the area, Safieva



shows how young women would spend their nights in the fields gathering the harvest in order to feed the soldiers at the front in World War II, rather than staying home with their families. She describes their patience, foresight, and courage, as well as their unrecognized rights, loyalty, and piety. The publication distinguished Gulrukhsor as the major woman novelist of Central Asia.⁷⁴ Here is a stanza from that work:

At heart, a hint of regret, and in mind your desire,
A hundred eyes watching, yet I want to be with you.
I am a bird, hungry for a grain of your caress,
With the hope of building a nest in your branches.
Under the barrage of looks, I would come to you,
But the cry of my child pulls me back,
No, I will not go...⁷⁵

In *Zan va Jang* (Woman and war), she reflects on the Tajik Civil War and distinguishes women and children as the true victims.⁷⁶ She recalls those she had interviewed by name and empathizes with them. She talks about the difficulty she had undergone to write the novel. “It revives scary, personal experiences and feeds my fear that I might be biased or dishonest to the reader,” she says.⁷⁷

In her *Sakarot* (Agony), which took eighteen years to write, she describes the ruthlessness of the mighty versus the weakness of the masses. Tajik intellectuals recognize the novel *Sakarot* as a special phenomenon delineating the realities of life under autocracy. The initial evaluation is positive. Regarding the overall contribution of this work to Tajik literature and society, however, it is too early to make a definite judgment. The rest of this

⁷⁴Ali Garmārūdī, *Az Sāqah tā Sadr, shi'r va zindigī-yi shu'arā-yi Tājikistān dar qarn-i bīstūm* [From stem to the top: Poetry and life of the Tajik poets of the 20th century] (Tehran: Qadyānī, 1389/2006), 572.

⁷⁵Abdumannonov, “Gulrukhsor,” 2:371.

⁷⁶Anora Sarkorova, “Bole ne ukhodut: 20 liet okonchaniya Grazhdanskoī voīni v Tadjikistane” [It still persists: 20 years after the end of the war in Tajikistan], *Ruskaya sluzhba Bi-Bi-Ci* [BBC Russian Service], (Iyunya [June] 27, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-40388821>.

⁷⁷Sarkorova, “Bole ne ukhodut.”

⁷⁸Iraj Bashiri, *Modern Iran: Caliphs, Kings, and Jurisprudents* (Solana Beach, CA: Cognella, Inc., 2017), 277.

⁷⁹Cf., Nafisī et al., “Shūr-i vatankhvāhī,” 400.

⁸⁰Abdurashidova, “Tafsiri badii vatan va millat dar davrai avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor.”

⁸¹Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash’ār*, 211–2.

article is devoted to exploring the quest for Tajik identity in the poetry of Gulruksor Safieva.

In Search for Tajik Identity

What is identity? Identity is not a single phenomenon. Rather, it is the result of a series of interactions among a multiplicity of phenomena that gather around a sensitive core and give it expression.⁷⁸ The core and its aspects have a particular affinity with each other such that if synthesis is not realized, the result is pseudo-identity. With the help of this simple frame, we can describe Tajik identity as a series of aspects such as peace, human rights, the Tajiki language, and Nawrūz, gathered around a core, such as love of motherland.⁷⁹ In what follows, we shall explore the fulcrum of Safieva’s view of her own identity (i.e., love of Aryan motherland) through her childhood, youth, and adulthood. Furthermore, we shall see how that core is buttressed by such factors as the Tajiki language, the treatment of women, and the Nawrūz celebration.

Love of Village

During the latter part of the twentieth century, in the republics of the former Soviet Union, love of motherland attracted special attention.⁸⁰ In her early poetry, Safieva considered her village as her homeland and related the world around her to it. In her mind, various aspects of communism surrounding her felt incongruous with the core of her inborn identity. She compensated for that lack by concentrating her attention on her family, especially her mother. In the poem “Modaram dar pushta khob ast” (My mother is sleeping in the grave), she is comforted that her mother is not disturbed by thunder and lightning and that even her own aloofness and unkindness toward her do not discomfort her...⁸¹ In “Turnai Az Sela Dur” (The crane separated from the flock), she holds a conversation with her mother where she says although death has separated us, when the almond trees sprinkle their blossoms, I feel the movement of the wind in my



hair as if it were the movement of your hand playing with my locks:

When the almond tree

Sprinkles its flowers on the graves

The spring breeze

Plays with my locks

For you.⁸²

At this point, Safieva's poetry is redolent with allusions to snow-capped peaks, lush river valleys, and the abundance of flowers, especially tulips, within the valleys. The village spring was also one of her haunts:

If I don't drink the spring water in my cupped hands, I remain thirsty,

If I don't soak my bread before eating it,⁸³ I remain hungry.⁸⁴

In the poem "Sihri Musiqi" (The magic of music), it is the sound of the waterfall that is magical:

The music of the waterfall will make me fine in one minute...⁸⁵

And in the poem "Nav Bahor Meoyad" (Springtime arrives), she paints a beautiful picture of the flight of the cranes over Yakhch:

The cranes line up as they fly over our village,

In this moment, all the village brooks are filled with ice-cold water.⁸⁶

⁸²Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash'ār*, 33–35.

⁸³Here Safieva is referring to her tattered school lunchbox and the piece of dried bread in the middle of her notebook, her lunch.

⁸⁴Abdurashidova, "Tafsiri badii vatan va millat dar davrai avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor."

⁸⁵Abdurashidova, "Tafsiri badii vatan va millat dar davrai avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor."

⁸⁶Abdurashidova, "Tafsiri badii vatan va millat dar davrai avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor."

⁸⁷Soviet politician; served as the last leader of the Soviet Union (1985–1991); introduced reforms that resulted in the dissolution of the Union and emergence of independent states.

⁸⁸Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash'ār*, 175–6.

⁸⁹Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash'ār*, 1–4.

Those poems, to a degree, summarize Safieva's self-consciousness before she moves to the city of Dushanbe.

Love of Soviet Tajikistan

Since the 1920s, two ideologies, communism and Islamism, had shaped identity in Tajikistan. In the 1960s, a new idea—gravitation to ancient Aryan culture—was added. Mikhail Gorbachev's (1931–2022)⁸⁷ reforms in the 1990s brought the three conflicting forces to the fore. In what follows, we shall look at Safieva's poetry as she searches for her identity in communism and Islam.

In the 1960s, Soviet Tajiks were busy building southern Tajikistan as a showcase of Soviet progress. Safieva was right there with them expressing her love. In the poem “Gohe, ki oshiq nistam” (When I am not in love),⁸⁸ she explains how the love and hopes of the people who live in a loveless world (i.e., the world outside the Soviet Union) appear meaningless to her. The love she talks about, of course, is her love for her village transformed into love for Soviet Tajikistan. In the poem “Tojikiston” (Tajikistan), the country constitutes her whole existence:

My honor, my credit,

My life, my fortune,

Whatever I am, I am with you,

Tajikistan!

My love is from land to the sky

I love you so dearly,

Tajikistan!⁸⁹



Eventually, aspects of communism including expansionism, disregard for human rights, and treatment of women, concretized in her mind and proved to be dramatically incongruous with aspects of her core identity. As a result, her zest for Soviet life subsides. She now sees communists as robbers who must leave her homeland. In “Ruzi Mahshar” (Resurrection day), she says:

Oh, you miserable robbers of the land of the Tajiks...

Leave the rocks of Tajikistan for me

I don't want gold!

Oh, you who dance at the altar of the demise of the pride of a homeland

Leave the pains of Tajikistan for me,

I do not want a different mother mourning at my humble grave.

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In the poem “Bekhobi” (Insomnia), she looks back on the treatment that she had received at the hands of her communist comrades. The picture she sees is that of a *mankurt*,⁹¹ similar to the *mankurts* depicted in Aitmatov's stories.⁹² The *mankurtization* process, she feels, has denied her and her people their identity:

The shaking claws of loneliness are at my throat

The paws of sleeplessness pull at my skirt

To see a pleasant face, I want to visit a neighbor,

But I cannot.

Henceforth, jokingly, love-stricken and drunk,

⁹⁰Gulrukhsor Safieva, “Sahroi Mahshar” [The plain of resurrection], in Devoni Gulrukhsor (Gulrukhsor collection of poems) (Dushanbe: Payvand, 2006), 99.

⁹¹Enslaved person that undergoes a dehumanization process that causes him to lose his memory to the point of not knowing himself.

⁹²Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (Moscow: Novyi Mir, 1988).

⁹³Gulruksor Safieva, "Bek-hobi" [Insomnia], in Devoni Gulruksor [Gulruksor collection of poems] (Dushanbe: Payvand, 2006), 109.

⁹⁴Sultan Mahmud (ruled 998–1030) invaded and plundered the temples of India seventeen times, used the booty to build his capital in Ghazni in present-day Afghanistan. Ayaz (d. 1041) was a slave who rose to the rank of officer and general in the army of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.

⁹⁵Gulruksor Safieva, *Zan va Jang* [Woman and War] (Dushanbe: Matbu'ot, 2001), 105–6.

I will not throw flowers on hypocrites,

My memory of memory has forgotten the meaning of happiness,

I am happy in my memorylessness.⁹³

Neither are the Soviets the only ones to blame. In the poem "Mahmud va Ayoz" (Mahmud and Ayaz⁹⁴) she blames her own treasonous countrymen, personified as Ayoz, for the mire in which Tajikistan sinks:

Let God forgive the vicious enemy,

I am being killed by my own mean kinfolk.

I am aware of the terror of Mahmuds,

The anger of Ayaz and his intrigues kill me.⁹⁵

Safieva implies that Tajiks routinely identify other peoples and ideologies such as Russians and Islam as the cause for their difficulties. If they look closer, she says, they will discover that they themselves, too, play a role. Here is the world in which Safieva would like to live. And for a fleeting moment she thinks that world would be possible if the Islamists could overthrow the Soviet system:

To rejuvenate myself,

I need the wing of truth to protect me.

A world without kings and paupers,

A world alien to conflict and war,

A thankful world devoid of anguish,



A blessed world of growth and perfection.⁹⁶

However, as discussed below, Safieva's dream of a new world created through Islam was a dream that has yet to turn into a reality.

Foray into Islamism

The Islamists who had been fighting the Soviets since the 1920s, and who surged in the 1960s, intensified their efforts in the 1970s under the leadership of Sayid Abdulloh Nuri (1947–2006). Nuri sought to establish a solid base for an Islamic Republic in Tajikistan. As mentioned, Safieva grew up in the Gharm region, where the Islamists had their headquarters. It was natural for her, therefore, to be caught up in the fervor of the revolution, abandon her membership in the USSR parliament and, in her own words, be reborn a revolutionary:

I was born a revolutionary,

I revolt instead of praying,

Like a woman who makes men recoil,

I revolt with coyness and with fists

I recall hanged men who live without heads

I revolt with pride, with dignity, and with glory.⁹⁷

In the poem "Chorzarb" (Chorzarb),⁹⁸ she describes herself as a proud, noble, and forgiving revolutionary with a heart devoid of hatred. A revolutionary, however, who refuses to kowtow to the powers that be, in this case, the Soviet Union.⁹⁹ She says even though she knows that torture and murder are the means with which the tyrants respond to revolutionary action, she is ready to pay that price:

⁹⁶Abdurashidova, "Tafsiri badii vatan va millat dar davrai avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor."

⁹⁷Safieva, Ruhi Bokhtar, 6–7.

⁹⁸Chorzarb is a classical Tajik melody here used as the title of a poem.

⁹⁹Khudāyār and Hūman, "Tahlil va sūratbandī-yi romāntizm-i ijtimā'i dar shi'r-i Gulruksār Safiyivā," 41.

¹⁰⁰Safieva, *Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār*, 576.

¹⁰¹An office based on the *Shari'a* (Islamic law) and under the leadership of a caliph (political-religious ruler of all Islamic lands).

¹⁰²Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Takhti Sangin* [The stone throne] (Dushanbe: Adib, 1992), 424.

For me,

In this ruined world, being fated

To drown in my own tears,

To burst in my own sigh, or

To die of burning pain

Is not strange.

I say no to appearing before the rat king,

I reject appearing in the festivities of the pupils of Satan.

I say no to the visionary traitors hungering for power,

To all that, I say: No!¹⁰⁰

But, in the end, she realizes that her enthusiasm for Islam, too, is superficial. At the beginning, she felt using Arabic words like *molk* (country) and *millat* (nation), instead of Tajiki words like *sarzamin* (land) and *mardum* (people), would make her poetry acceptable to Islamic audiences. But she found out very quickly that she was wrong. Her poetry, redolent with love for the *sarzamini tojikon* (the land of the Tajiks) lacked the type of background in which *molk* and *millat* interact and evoke love for the Islamic caliphate.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the Islamists' maltreatment of women, their medieval sense of justice, and their utter disregard for borders disappointed her. All those factors together dissuaded her.¹⁰²

For Tajiks, the word *nomus* (honor) connotes both the honor of the individual and his family, as well as the integrity of the land of the Tajiks. The Soviets had denied the Tajiks the privilege of having their own land distinct from the Soviet lands. Through-



out her life, Safieva had been unhappy with that imposition. Now she realized that Islam too, by regarding all Islamic lands as integral parts of a caliphate, would not recognize Tajikistan as a sovereign entity, and thus her love for Islam subsided. At this juncture, for Safieva, the borders of her homeland were tantamount to the foundational building blocks of her identity:

The building block of my honor in life

Is the peak of the spirit of the people.¹⁰³

The Aryan Motherland

While communism and Islamism were well established ideologies, ancient Aryan culture was unknown to the Tajik public. But, with the popularity of Tojikon of Bobojon Ghafurov,¹⁰⁴ when the whole society became suffused with nostalgia for the past glory of the Tajiks, the situation changed. Safieva seized this opportunity and focused her attention on the tenets of the prophet Zoroaster,¹⁰⁵ as those tenets had been observed by her Sogdian ancestors. This was a sea change for Safieva on two accounts.

Firstly, with her exploration of Zoroastrianism, Safieva was learning for the first time about aspects of identity that were perfectly congruent with her own core identity. It was as if those aspects grew out of that core naturally. For example, in the following verse, consider the word vatan as she explains it versus the value of that term in Islamic and communist understandings of the concept. She says in the same way that dud (smoke) would not exist without the existence of a fire, nang (honor) would not exist without the existence of the soil of the motherland. Both the communist and Islamic ideologies are expansionist in nature and are geopolitically oriented. The motherland that Safieva has in mind is the love that is within the boundaries of the village and the homeland. It is the kind of love that is in an individual's DNA and, like water in the fountain, bubbles to

¹⁰³Safieva, Ruhi Bokhtar, 5.

¹⁰⁴Tajik historian, academician, and the author of several books published in Russian and Tajiki about the history of Tajikistan.

¹⁰⁵Spiritual founder of Zoroastrianism, a dualistic religion that advocates good thought, good words, and good deeds.

¹⁰⁶Safieva, Ruhi Bokhtar, 6.

¹⁰⁷Khudāyār and Hūman,
“Tahlīl va sūratbandī-yi
romāntizm-i ijtimā’ī dar shi’r-i
Gulruksār Safiyivā,” 41.

¹⁰⁸Abdurashidova, “Tafsiri
badii vatan va millat dar davrai
avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor.”

¹⁰⁹Safieva, Majmū’ah-yi ash’ār,
179.

¹¹⁰Abdurashidova, “Tafsiri
badii vatan va millat dar davrai
avvali ijodiyoti Gulruksor.”

the surface automatically:

The smoke exists because of the burning of the flame,

Honor exists because of the soil of the motherland.¹⁰⁶

The second sea change had to do with the fact that this was the first time that Safieva realized she must introduce drastic changes in the writing and presentation of her poetry. Unlike the court poet, who composes poetry on demand, she felt she must write according to the dictate of her identity (i.e., promote aspects of her identity), rather than according to orders from above.¹⁰⁷

Let’s burn the verses that we wrote to appease,

Circumstances require a different spirit and a different approach.¹⁰⁸

Thereafter, Sughdia, representing her ancient Aryan heritage, occupies a special place in her heart and emerges in her poetry in various forms:

I have fire from the Sogdians’ temple of fire,¹⁰⁹

Using the rich literary heritage of the Sogdians, she paints a unique picture of Tajik history populated by boboi Sughd (Sogdian forefather), momoi Sughd (Sogdian mother), and Sughd-nasab (of Sogdian extraction). Even within the spark in the eyes of the Tajiks, when they express their love, she sees indications of the Sogdian fire with which their Aryan ancestors have blessed them. More importantly, she regards the tradition of the worship of fire as a bequest left her by her Sogdian ancestors:

I have inherited the tradition of the worship of the fire,

As a bequest from my Sogdian ancestors.¹¹⁰



Gradually, social and political boundaries of the past give way to spiritual and cultural values in Safieva's work. Further, her poetry begins to include the people of the Persianate world, especially Iran. In the following well-known stanza from a long poem called "Īrān" (Iran), Safieva pays homage to the purity of the spiritual and cultural light that burns in the heart of every member of the Aryan community irrespective of the trappings of time and tide:

Oh, green land of affection,

Oh, artery of the pulse of poetry,

Oh, distant one, close to life,

Oh, light of the heart and the eye,

There is an Ahuric poem

In every rock that belongs to you.

A genius rises from every span of your soil,

My dear Iran,

My dear existence.¹¹¹

In this poem, in the context of Iran,¹¹² Safieva uses a number of potent allusions to the mythical and historical personages of ancient Iran. In the opening verse, she refers to Mithra,¹¹³ also known as Mithra of the green pastures, and the companion of Ahura Mazda,¹¹⁴ the deity who authored the Ahuric songs and who is the creator of the land graced with innumerable geniuses. With similar references to mythical Jamshid,¹¹⁵ the monarch who introduced the Nawrūz celebration, and Arash¹¹⁶ who, at the expense of his own life, established the boundary between Iran and Turan, she retrieves the bygone identity of ev-

¹¹¹Muhammad 'Ismā'īl Shafī'pūr Fūmānī, and 'Abbās'alī Vafā'i, "Naqd va barrāsī-yi nawāvarī dar shi'r-i mu'āsir-i Tājīkistān" [Criticism and study of innovation in contemporary poetry of Tajikistan"], *Sabkshināstī-yi Nazm va Nasr-i Fārsī* 13, no. 49 (1399/2018): 69.

¹¹²Cf., Nafīsī et al., "Shūr-i vatankhvāhī," 411.

¹¹³God of light and guardian of prairies; Mithra's cult, Mithraism, spread from India in the east to as far west as Spain and Great Britain.

¹¹⁴Zoroaster's God; creator of light and darkness and ruler of the spiritual and material worlds through six Holy Immortals.

¹¹⁵Celebrated monarch in Iranian mythology, established the Nawrūz celebration.

¹¹⁶Heroic archer-figure of Iranian oral tradition; determined the boundary between Iran and Turan.

¹¹⁷Garmārūdī, Az Sāqah tā Sadr, 573.

ery present-day Tajik, Afghan, and Iranian, irrespective of their place of residence. Additionally, in a poem called “Shohnoma” (Shahnameh), she adds khirad (wisdom) to the ethical and spiritual aspects of the Aryan ideology, an ideology that in ancient times had served as the guiding light not only for kings implementing the triad of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, but also for the ordinary individual. In another poem called “Shohnoma Vatan Ast” (Shahnameh is motherland), she extols Firdawsi’s repeated use of the khirad concept in his epic. Furthermore, she identifies the Shahnameh as a motherland that cannot be wrested from the Tajiks either by sword or by fraud.¹¹⁷

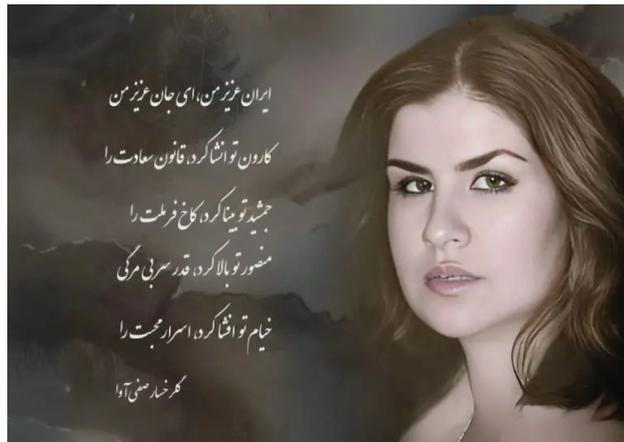


Figure 4: Portrait of Gulrukhsor along with one of her poems about Iran

Aspects of Tajik Identity

The following factors, and many others like them, buttress Tajik identity. Each aspect is a major topic in its own right. Here, a simplified form of three of the crucial components of Tajik identity is presented to illustrate the construction of Tajik national identity through the poetry of Gulrukhsor Safieva.

The Tajiki Language

Language is a vital aspect of national identity. Iranians, Afghans,



and Tajiks consider the Persian language as a major aspect of their identity. Thus, despite their socio-political and ideological differences, they have safeguarded their language (in the distinct dialects of Farsi, Dari, and Tajiki), and, over the centuries, maintained the conduit that keeps the Persianate world united. In the case of the Tajiki language, during the Soviet era, it was dominated by the Russian language and reduced to a vernacular.¹¹⁸ The Arabic-based Tajiki script was changed to Latin in 1927, and then to Cyrillic in 1939.¹¹⁹ Similarly, libraries were burned and prominent cultural icons were degraded. This situation obtained until the Khrushchev era when the strict communist rules were relaxed. Under Gorbachev, whose reforms allowed the Tajiks to speak openly about their past, Tajiki was re-installed as the official language.

The revival of the past had begun before the fall of the Soviet Union and poets like Sobir and Safieva recognized the pivotal role of language and had begun their efforts to strengthen Tajiki. During the transition from Russian to Tajiki (1989),¹²⁰ they defended their *zaboni modari* (mother tongue) fiercely and thereafter enriched their poetry by drawing on their ancient Iranian heritage. Opportunities to meet Iranian poets helped Safieva to become familiar with the poetic tradition of Iran's women poets like Forugh Farrokhzad and Simin Behbahani. Inspired by them, she tried to know herself better and, through her poetry, to inform her people of their identity.¹²¹

My eyes are more expressive than my tongue

My eyes speak in Tajiki

My pain becomes tearful with Tajiki

My happiness becomes happy with Tajiki.¹²²

In fact, without her mother tongue, Safieva considers herself to be without a people, without a country, and without a mother.¹²³

¹¹⁸Iraj Bashiri, "Russian Loan-words in Persian and Tajiki," in *Persian Studies in North America: studies in honor of Professor Mohammad Ali Jazayeri*, ed. Mehdi Marashi (Bethesda, MD: Iranbooks, 1994), 109–41.

¹¹⁹Salim Ayubzod, *Tojikon dar qarni bistom* [The Tajiks in the twentieth century], ed. Iraj Bashiri (Prague: Post Scriptum Imprimator, 2002), 294–6.

¹²⁰Iraj Bashiri, *The History of the Civil War in Tajikistan* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 139.

¹²¹Cf., Khudāyār and Hūman, "Tahlīl va sūratbandī-yi romāntism-i ijtimāī dar shi'r-i Gulrukhsār Safiyivā," 26–27.

¹²²Gulrukhsor Safieva, *Oinai Ruz* [Mirror of the day] (Dushanbe: Irfan, 1984), 6.

¹²³Safieva, *Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār*, 153.

¹²⁴Gulrukhsor recited this poem at the Supreme Soviet on the occasion of granting the Tajiki language official language status; Safieva, Gulchīnī az ash‘ār, 85–86. “First revolution” is a reference to the October Revolution.

¹²⁵Iraj Bashiri, “Bozor Sobir’s Life,” Working paper, 2000. Available at https://www.academia.edu/107885443/Bozor_Sobirs_Life (includes a translation of “Mother tongue.”)

¹²⁶Cf., Nafīsī et al., “Shūr-i vatankhvāhī,” 404–5.

In the poem “Zaboni Rudaki” (The language of Rūdakī), she summarizes the difficulties that, over centuries, the Tajiki language has undergone under Arabs, Turks, and Soviets:

O language of the angels on earth,

You are my temple and my religion.

Who needed the first revolution?

You are my last revolution,

Oh, eternal language of Rudaki!¹²⁴

Her laments recall Bozor Sobir’s splendid poem “Zaboni Modari,” that condemns the suppression of the Tajiki language by the Uzbeks.¹²⁵ Another aspect of Tajik identity is the treatment of women, especially in Soviet Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. We turn to that subject now.

Treatment of Women

Gulrukhsor is an emotional poet. Her art is redolent with novelty, femininity, and patriotic fervor. She holds women in high esteem and tries to awaken them to their inherent rights. She also tries to educate her audience about the plight of working women. Her feelings are genuine, informed, and sincere.¹²⁶ In the poem “Khiyoboni Zani Tanho” (The street of the lonely woman), she depicts illiterate Tajik women during the Soviet era who swept the streets of Dushanbe at dawn. Nobody paid attention to either their unrecognized rights, or to their dignity. If anything, most felt they deserved the poor treatment they received because they were uneducated and did not speak Russian. Gulrukhsor sympathizes with those women and exposes the cruelty of the system. Even the streets of Dushanbe, she says, indict the heedlessness of people, especially of men:



Oh men, why are you laughing?

¹²⁷Safieva, *Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār*,
174.

Oh people, why are you silent?

¹²⁸Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash'ār*,
48–50.

The street of the lonely woman

Condemns you.¹²⁷

In the poem “Najot” (Rescue), she says women instinctively—and in spite of the socio-cultural and ethical situations that obtain—preserve their own honor, as well as the dignity of those they care for. The tragedy is that they are chastised because of performing such acts of kindness:

From blame,

From remorse

From guilt

I took precaution

As if I were made of glass

I have not only rescued myself from going astray,

I have rescued you, too.¹²⁸

While in “Khiyoboni Zani Tanho,” Safieva describes the miserable state of certain women in society, and in “Najot” praises women’s protective instinct, in the poem “Intiqomi Zan” (Woman’s revenge), she says there is only one recourse left open to women, departure:

I will leave your marmoreal nest,

Your first

¹²⁹Safieva, Gulchīnī az ash'ār, 172–3.

¹³⁰Safieva, Gulchīnī az ash'ār, 62–64.

¹³¹Safieva, Majmū'ah-yi ash'ār, 87.

¹³²Nafīsī et al., “Shūr-i vatankh-vāhī,” 64.

¹³³Safieva, Gulchīnī az ash'ār, 17.

¹³⁴Safieva, Gulchīnī az ash'ār, 206–8.

Your last

Your best!¹²⁹

In the poem “Surudi Zani Tanho” (The song of the lonely woman), she blames fate for women’s loneliness.¹³⁰ Even as Modari Millat (The mother of the nation), she says, she is lonely:

My dance is a lonely journey through the pangs of death,

I am not the mother of the nation, I am the mother of loneliness.¹³¹

The Nawrūz Celebration

The third and last aspect of Tajik identity to be discussed is cultural celebrations.¹³² Safieva celebrates Nawrūz as a time dedicated to rejuvenation and renewal of ties of love and friendship, as well as an opportunity for mending and reconciliation. In “Guid Ba Navruz” (Tell Nawrūz), she responds to a poem by Ustod Khalili (d. 1987), who, due to the situation obtaining in war-torn Afghanistan asks Nawrūz not to visit the nation of the blood-stained shrouds.¹³³ Safieva responds:

Tell Nawrūz,

That sorrow is not new to us,

That our eyes are wet

Weeping over those in blood-stained shrouds,

That our backs are bent under the curse of our fathers.

Tell Nawrūz to visit every day.¹³⁴

In the course of the poem, Safieva not only asks Nawrūz to



come often, but describes the things that Nawrūz should bring: victory, remedy for pain-burning wounds, and a message of hope. In another poem, “Nawrūz” (New Year), she approaches Nawrūz philosophically and identifies it as an agent of flux. Nawrūz constantly brings in the new and takes away the old.¹³⁵ It should not be stopped.

Today, in other Persianate countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Nawrūz celebration is considered secondary to similar Islamic celebrations. In fact, leaders of those countries take measures to downgrade Nawrūz with the hope that it will disappear. In those countries, the populations struggle to uphold their pre-Islamic heritage. To the contrary, the present-day Tajik leadership has elevated Nawrūz to the point of international recognition.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Safieva, an orphan, received a socialist education in an otherwise Islamic environment. After graduation from college, she rose to high positions in the Communist Party. At the beginning of the Tajik Civil War, she became disenchanted with the Communist Party and joined the Islamists as a poet of resistance. When the Islamists tried to murder her, she was rescued by the Russian army.

Safieva’s creative activity is focused on Tajik identity. As a child, she identified with her village, as a youth, she sought her identity in Soviet Tajikistan and in Islam. In her adulthood, as a result of acquaintance with Zoroastrianism and the Sogdian ways, she made a sea change in her life and poetry and promoted aspects of her ancient Aryan culture. This powerful ideology, which is based on cultural and spiritual freedom, and which rests at the core of the identity of every Iranian, she believes, has the potential of uniting the Persianate world.

¹³⁵Safieva, *Gulchīnī az ash’ār*, 12.

¹³⁶For details see, Iraj Bashiri, “Nowruz: Ritual and Substance,” in *Avesta va Tamadduni Jahani* (Dushanbe: Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, 2001), 170–3. Revised edition available at https://www.academia.edu/7910067/Nowruz_Origins_and_Rituals. (The revised edition outlines the type of measures that the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran take to misguide the populace and demote the significance of the Nawrūz celebrations.)