

Marxian Ideology and the Basics of Socialist Realism in Georgian Literature at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century

Abstract: At the end of the 19th century interesting processes occur in Georgian literature. One of the various processes is Marxism that appears as a great innovation in social cognition. Marxism combines with the traditions of realism in literature and provides the foundation of socialist realism in Georgian literature developed later.

Key words: Marxism, Socialist Realism, Realism

Marxian Ideology and the Basics of Socialist Realism in Georgian Literature at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century

At the end of the 19th century Georgian literature is rich enough. At the time the writers of the 1860s are still actively involved in literary processes. Together with them there are Populists on the literary and public arena. And the literature of the 1890s becomes more interesting and diverse because of appearance of the writers known as “The Third Group” (“Mesame Dasi”).

Now we are going to discuss the attitude towards social matters at the end of the 19th century literature. Due to the peculiarity of the issue, the research won't be perfect without taking early literary tendencies and historical context into our consideration.

Research about the socialist approach has got an interesting history. Some schools of Literary Studies ignored mimetic aspects of literature (New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism). However, there were such movements that aimed to study the content of literature. For example, Marxian criticism was interested in a literary text as long as it depicted particular social-economic conditions. Georg Lukacs's study does not include modernist writers because reality is vague in their creation and Marxian tradition of depiction is not kept.

Such polarization of the issue – form and content analysis - is bad for perfect perception of literature. Dario Villanuava talks about this theme in his discussions about the phenomena of reality and realism. His work is an attempt to find the equilibrium between the principle of literature independence from realism and the second controversial approach according to which, a literary text is based on reality.

One more movement known as “sociology of literature” refers to interdependence between literature and social matters. The following idea is the basis for the movement: “Literature is the main sphere of public cognition” (Aron... 2011: 9). Life observations of the authors are depicted in their literary texts. This is especially true of realistic literature not only in Georgian but European one.

Social character of literature became the beginning of Marxian concepts. The opinions about literature and art belonging to Marx and Engels helped to develop such a movement that controlled literary processes during totalitarian epoch.

From this point of view, Lenin's work “Party Organizations and Party Literature” published in 1905 is really worth paying attention to: “Literary work should become a part of common work, a wheel and a screw of one complete social-democratic mechanism” (Lenin 1975: 12). Creative processes lost their freedom and fell under the party influence in this way.

Marxian criticism was interested in a text content and paid no attention to a form. Naturally, this means shortcomings of the research methodology. “sociology of literature” that is a modern movement studying a social character of literature does not ignore a form of a text. So “social poetics” developed together with “social criticism”.

The attitude towards social matters changed in Georgia in the 19th century. Public life flows slowly until the 1850s. But then there is a big evidence of awakening – theatre was set up and the magazine “Tsiskari”, too.

Discussing the history of Georgian aristocracy, Archil Jorjadze grants a great importance to “Tsiskari”. Debates around a social issue began on the sheets of this magazine when “Surami Fortress” by Daniel Chonkadze was published and in response to it, Al. Orbeliani published his letter where he states that Georgian serfdom was not strict at all.

Based on factual data, Steven Jones in his work “Socialism in Georgian colours” shows that Georgian serfdom was not like a relationship between a father and a son. For the scholar, D. Chonkadze’s “Surami Fortress” implies the following idea: “Traditional social and economical classes will be replaced by social classes and obedient subordinates will change into revolutionaries” (Jones 2007: 39).

The second half of the 19th century is remarkable for activation of public values in literature. Personalism peculiar for romanticism was replaced by a deep feeling for reality in the 1850s. This process ended in foundation of a Georgian realistic school in the 1860s. The writer’s mission is not only “looking into the sky” but he has to depict reality. Moreover, he assumes responsibility for being a leader of nation. Accordingly, art was at service of people and nation. National issue was of a great importance. However, social one was also widely discussed. Literary texts, that were created at the time, bore this aim, too (“The Sportsman’s Story”, “Several Episodes”...)

Different attitudes towards social issue turned out to be the cause of opinion clash among the writers of the 1960s. This collision ended in breakaway of “The Second Group” (“mesame dasi”).

In the 1880s Populism (“khalkhosnoba”) began in Georgia. The main object of depiction becomes poor peasantry. Although this movement did not gain strong support in Georgia, their appearance brought a great innovation into Georgian cognition. This was a new type of aristocracy coming out of people that emphasized social issue.

The situation in the 1880s is clearly described Giorgi Maiashvili’s letter “To our public figures”. Obviously, the new generation inspired by an European example has got some questions to “The Tergdaleulebi”. G. Maiashvili talks about Ireland where economical independence is believed to be crucial to national one. First of all, the country fights for economical independence. What is the situation like in Georgia? Admiration for the country is not enough to achieve high goals. Where is the main action plan? These are the questions asked by G. Maiashvili.

In 1894 the programme of “The Third Group” (“mesame dasi”) was published in the magazine “Kvali” and this was the first public appearance of this movement. Did poor working class really represent Marxism in Georgia?

Discussing the period of the 1890s in Georgia, Steven Jones remarks that the word “worker” that had associated with the person who carries load changed its meaning at the time. It was caused by economical growth, building the railway, opening of lots of small factories. Correspondingly, the type of a hired worker turned up providing the foundation of Marxism in Georgia.

A great support for Marxism was Populism ('khalkhosnoba'). Young Georgian people (Ph. Makharadze, N. Zhordania) went abroad and they linked there some illegal organizations that played an important role in spreading of Marxism in Georgia.

The period of the 1890s was considered to be the beginning of Marxian literature in Soviet criticism. The main innovation of Marxian literature was the idea of class consolidation that collided with understanding of national identity peculiar to the movement of the 1860s (S. Chilaia).

E. Ninoshvili was considered to be the first representative of Marxian literature. Soviet and post-Soviet criticism had different attitudes to this writer. Soviet critics acknowledged him as their own writer and they positively estimated his personal and creative activity (Ph. Makharadze, V. Kerdzevadze, S. Kubaneishvili, N. Paichadze...). But in the post-Soviet epoch they had doubts about E. Ninoshvili's Marxism. I. Evgenidze studies his biography but he does not find any links between Marxism and the writer. His creation is described in the context of Ilia Chavchavadze's ideals. Critics are thought to have changed their opinions (attitudes) after having realized the results of totalitarianism during the post-Soviet years. The brutal experience of Marxism helped the beginning of a new tendency: they decided to ignore the relations between Marxism and literature while studying the past literary heritage. E. Ninoshvili had such rough luck.

The contemporaries of the writer talk about Ninoshvili's links with the first Marxists. The theme of poor peasantry is peculiar to his creation that makes the writer close to traditions of Populist literature. How did the Populist writer become Marxist? The answer to this question can be found in Noe Zhordania and Philip Makharadze's memories where they talk about how they got acquainted with Marxism. Both of them remember that they had no idea about Marxism until going to Warsaw in 1891 and they shared the Populists' outlook. But they were not satisfied with it. While being in Warsaw, they got acquainted with Marxian ideology in local illegal groups and contacted their friends in Georgia. N. Zhordania names E. Ninoshvili among such friends. While the new generation with new ideas returned to Georgia in the 1860s after having been abroad and began to preach national ideas, the new generation that came back in the 1890s found the solution, too. But at this time the innovation and progress was Marxism that was absorbed with great eagerness by the part of the generation of the 1890s.

This is E. Ninoshvili's contemporaneousness. In the beginning he follows Populism and dedicates his creation to the oppressed class when there was still a peasant and not a labourer. But there are some elements that make the writer have the approach different from populists. In "Simona" we can find some signs of overcoming class struggle. Here the conflict is caused by the people who are not in equal material conditions and Marxism appears on this basis (disagreement between Droidze and Dzaladze). In his programme speech, Silibistro Jibladze comes against Ilia Chavchavadze's "Otarant Widow" because, in his opinion, Ilia cannot understand that the reason for class struggle is not the position but economical conditions.

Actually, in the novel "The Revolt in Guria", E. Ninoshvili defends the principles of socialist realism. In the novel historical past is seen from the position of class struggle. Besides, internationalism can also be noticed. The author's imaginary personage, Giorgi does not support the rebellion against Russia and calls for fighting against serfdom with joint attempts because both Russian and Georgian peasantry is oppressed by it. A Russian soldier is the only person who sympathizes with the killed Gurian peasant. Looking at the historical past in this way, E. Ninoshvili is greatly different from the views of the writers of the 1860s. For Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, the past comes alive again to help national ideology to confirm. There is some affinity between E. Ninoshvili's novel "The Revolt in Guria" and Mikheil Javakhishvili's "Arsena Marabdeli". The latter follows the scheme of socialist realism and it is fully aware of it. Class struggle is seen in the historical past and the idea of internationalism is also actualized. In E. Ninoshvili's time, the theory of socialist was not established. However, the writer manages to defend the principles of

the movement properly. Correspondingly, at the end of the 1880s, a piece of Georgian literature was created following later principles of socialist realism.

In Georgian literature E. Ninoshvili is followed by such writers who respond to the socialist movement that was stronger at the end of the century. Depiction of class struggle was gradually changed into calling to eliminate the collision (“Tina”, “Accident” by Lalioni).

At the beginning of the 20th century the fight becomes more radical. Workers go on strike, illegal organizations work hard to rally workers, the government fight against revolutionaries.

These attitudes influence one part of our literature. New personages such as brave revolutionaries appear. Blooded demonstrations and lives of prisoners are depicted. Chola Lomtadze’s creation is a good example of it. For him, literature is a means of depicting personal experience.

In 1905 Lenin’s work “Party Organizations and Party Literature” was published. Symbolically, Irodion Evdoshvili’s “Labourer and Muse” was published in the same year. While the writers of the 1860s thought that their function was to describe reality, the tendency became extremist at the time: literature has got clearly determined goals: it has to depict an unfair social system, to make the reader act and to contribute to victory of the proletariat in this way.

Actually, this part of Georgian literature defends the principles of socialist realism. Later under the Soviet rule, when victorious Bolsheviks found some time for literature, socialist realism was acknowledged as the only literary method in the whole Soviet Union. This happened at the Soviet writers’ meeting in 1934.

Socialist realism is defined in a different way in the Soviet and Post-Soviet criticism as well as in west and Soviet science.

How is socialist realism related with realism? Is it realism at all?

Socialist realism involved depicting reality in the form that was acceptable for ideology. That’s why the picture described by it was not real but “desirable”.

Classical realism was free of such tendencies. Developed in Europe, this movement tried to depict reality objectively. Being against the fiction of romanticism, realism was eager to describe everyday life and situation.

In this respect, socialist realism and classical realism are different literary movements. But there is still one similarity between them: to make the theme of “earthly world” enroot in art. The ideologists of socialist realism were strong opponents of modernism – individualistic understanding of art and the principle “Art for Art” made it impossible to make literature be “a wheel” and “a screw”. Literature, that had to form a Soviet man, was to be understandable for everybody.

The principles of classical realism had an interesting image in Georgian reality. „The Tergdaleulebi” had one peculiarity: they not only struggled against the idea of elite art but they defined its functions, too. Literature was at the service of “something” and this “something” was national ideology. Georgian realism, that was one of backbones in the literature of the 19th century, kept the position of being at the service of “something”. However, at the end of the century it gradually changed its image and devoted itself to another ideology. So realism, that begun in the 1860s, fell under the influence of Marxism and created the basis for socialist realism in Georgian literature.

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