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The Protagonist's Spiritual Crisis and Artistic Psychologism in Salomat Vafo's Short Story "Muqaddas Manzil" ("The Sacred Destination")

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Abstract: This article examines the protagonist's inner world and the issue of artistic psychologism in "Muqaddas Manzil" ("The Sacred Destination"), a short story by the prominent Uzbek writer Salomat Vafo. Through the character of the protagonist, Tufa, the article analyzes how the conventional stereotype of the "patient and obedient mother" in traditional Uzbek literature is challenged, revealing instead the tragedy of a real woman undergoing a spiritual crisis under societal pressure. The findings are of practical significance for studying the concept of womanhood and psychological realism in contemporary Uzbek prose.

Keywords: Salomat Vafo, "Muqaddas Manzil" ("The Sacred Destination"), Tufa, psychologism, society, tragedy, epigraph, motherhood archetype.

In Uzbek short fiction of the independence period, the depiction of the human inner world, spiritual transformations, and conflicts with the social environment has become one of the leading artistic principles. New aesthetic and artistic perspectives have emerged particularly in portraying women's nature, their suffering under social pressure, and their inner rebellion. In this respect, the work of the talented writer Salomat Vafo deserves particular attention. Her short story "Muqaddas Manzil" breaks decisively with the conventional mold of smooth, idealized characters in traditional Uzbek prose and represents a new development in Uzbek fiction. The lines by Rauf Parfi quoted at the beginning of the story — "If you kill, you have only killed yourself; greetings to the gallows tree" — are not merely decorative; rather, they establish the tragic atmosphere of the work. The epigraph contains the philosophical idea that although a person's physical life can be ended by killing them, their spiritual essence cannot be destroyed through such an act. The line "If you kill, you have only killed yourself" suggests that the person who commits violence is, in fact, the one who loses their humanity, conscience, and moral identity.

In this context, the "gallows tree" represents the merciless social environment closing in on the protagonist Tufa from every side, the indifference of those around her, and her harsh fate. The society in which the woman lives has, for her, become one vast place of execution. The psychological anguish Tufa experiences, her child's suffering, and the condemnation of others torment her every day as though she were being spiritually hanged on that gallows. Yet by saying "Greetings," she acknowledges the tragic reality and painful atmosphere surrounding her and begins a courageous spiritual rebellion against them. A close artistic analysis of the text shows that the concept of "Muqaddas Manzil" ("The Sacred Destination"), foregrounded in the title, functions in the composition of the story as an absolute spiritual point toward which a person strives and as an object of existential quest. The plot is built around Tufa's efforts to find such a destination — a place where she and her sick child might receive human affection, compassion, and genuine refuge. Within the artistic fabric of the story, however, this aspiration is not tied to geopolitical or everyday coordinates; it is an absolute philosophical category revealed through the individual's spiritual transformations. By systematically dismantling every external support on which the protagonist relies and from which she expects salvation, the writer exposes, through profound psychological analysis, the chain of destinations that a human being seeks and longs for. The first and most fundamental stage in the evolution of Tufa's spiritual quest is the absolute blood bond and maternal instinct bestowed by nature. The infant's cries shatter the conventional image of the

"patient, obedient mother" within the woman and awaken maternal feelings in every one of her seventy-two thousand veins. This lyrical and psychological turning point is depicted in the text as follows: "The child's cries, as if asking, 'Where is my mother?', poured into her being... The feelings of kinship, closeness, and motherhood hidden in the deepest layers of her seventy-two thousand veins surged forth, and she took the child into her arms as tenderly as one would cherish a handful of pearls." In this episode, the infant is not merely a physical being to the mother; the child is the purest spiritual treasure she seeks to protect from every hardship along life's path — the first symbolic embodiment of the sacred goal toward which she strives. As Tufa tenderly takes the infant into her arms like "a handful of pearls," she unknowingly discovers her first sphere of spiritual protection against social pressure and the crisis of the external environment: her inviolable maternal refuge. However, the protagonist's next social attempt to find salvation in the outside world encounters the merciless deconstruction of society. In the hospital episode, the doctor's insinuating remarks to Tufa about her unmarried status, and the fact that the doctor prioritizes official documents and social stereotypes over the child's painful, pus-filled ear, lay bare the moral crisis of the very institutions from which people expect salvation. Society is concerned not with an individual's suffering but with its own rigid conventions, and the place from which Tufa expects justice and compassion turns out to be cold and self-serving. Geologist Muhammadkarim's irresponsibility and betrayal leave the woman utterly alone in poverty and social isolation on the outskirts of the city, bringing her worldly and everyday sources of support to an end.

The distinctive feature of the writer's artistic conception is that, by closing off every external door of hope for the protagonist, she brings Tufa into a state of absolute existential loneliness and thereby encourages the reader to seek the true meaning of the destination a person longs for within the inner self. Having become helpless in the face of the falseness, indifference, and cruelty of the outside world, the individual should ultimately turn toward inner patience, spiritual resilience, and maternal dignity. Accordingly, in the ideological and emotional structure of the story, the idealized "Sacred Destination" is not a place one can physically reach or a sanctuary from which one expects mercy from another person. Rather, it is the pinnacle of inner spiritual maturity at which a person is able to preserve faith, humanity, and purity even amid social tragedy and despair. As emphasized in Rauf Parfi's epigraph, in the face of the cruel gallows and painful climate of the physical world, Tufa should not surrender spiritually; through suffering and catharsis, she should discover the true sacred destination toward which she has striven throughout her life — the inviolable light of her own heart. However, it is important to emphasize that the spiritual transformations Tufa undergoes under the pressure of society and in the grip of isolation lead her maternal nature into an absolute crisis, and at the end of the story she commits a horrific act: she pours boiling water over her own child. From the perspective of literary criticism and human values, although this episode demonstrates the protagonist's profound helplessness, it is a morally appalling act that can never be justified under any circumstances and must be condemned. In depicting the protagonist's social and existential tragedy, Salomat Vafo uses this act to show how tragically the motherhood archetype is shattered and how the individual's psyche descends into degradation. No matter how hard-hearted society may be, Tufa's act of ending the life of her defenseless child is not a rebellion against the outside world; on the contrary, it is a terrible moral defeat through which she destroys her most sacred mission. This final crisis leads the concept of "Muqaddas Manzil" to a tragic conclusion: the sacredness that a person fails to find in the outside world is ultimately demolished by their own hand within their inner world as well, and the spiritual death foreseen by Rauf Parfi becomes an inescapable reality.

The study of Salomat Vafo's short story "Muqaddas Manzil" shows that the work breaks with traditional stereotypes in Uzbek prose of the independence period and opens a new page in the treatment of artistic psychologism and existential crisis. The dialectic of life and death in Rauf

Parfi's epigraph forms a conceptual unity with the symbol of "Muqaddas Manzil" presented in the title. This destination is the highest point of spiritual and moral maturity that an individual seeks through external social institutions but ultimately must discover within the inviolability of their own heart. Although the death of the infant is not explicitly stated as a textual fact at the end of the story, the mother's horrific act at the final crossroads of desperation indicates the complete disintegration of her psyche. This tragic episode demonstrates that the woman, trapped by social pressure, has also brought the last spiritual refuge she sought to ruin within her own inner world.

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