

ELEMENTS OF HUMOR IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE JOURNAL MOLLA NASREDDIN IN AZARBAIJAN

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Humor can be considered a branch of the literary traditions of a society. Like literature, humor cannot always be understood without knowledge of the society which produces it. This is a critical point. Some observers claim that in a given culture, country or nation, humor does not exist. This is a rather rash "judgement." Rather, the question ought to be "Are we properly equipped to understand the humor of the people we are studying?"

Translation of humor, in its many facets, is a thankless task. Even when the words of an anecdote are translated from one language to another, it cannot be guaranteed that the speakers of the target language can grasp its significance. The textbook or even speaking knowledge of another language may be insufficient to comprehend the humor in that language.

The highest level of language competency, native fluency, is attained when the humor is understood.

Understanding humor, on the other hand, requires knowledge of common reference points, among which are history, current events, tradition and custom. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the original culture is the minimum requirement.

Central Asia has produced humor throughout its history. We can at least begin to understand the nature of this humor through a simultaneous study of history and current events. The specific example at hand illustrates this point. The journal *Molla Nasreddin* was published in Tbilisi, Tabriz and Baku, in that order, 1906-1920. It was a satirical publication, taking as inspiration the widely-known Molla Nasreddin, or Nasreddin Hoja.

The Historical Nasreddin Hoja

The historical Nasreddin Hoja can be considered a populist philosopher, wit and wise man. The contents of the many anecdotes about him suggest that Nasreddin Hoja lived in Asia Minor sometime between the 11th and the 14th centuries. The stories attributed to him display a biting sense of humor and the anecdotes themselves have satirical qualities that go immediately to the heart of the matter. Subtleties of his pronouncements many not be apparent at first, but cannot be dismissed off-hand even by the most cynical.

Nasreddin Hoja stories are well known from the shores of Aegean to the Eastern reaches of Sinkiang, where he is known as "Effendi." One of his statues adorns a city square in Bukhara, depicting the esteemed Hoja riding his donkey backwards, as told in one of his anecdotes. Many a punchline from his anecdotes have long since reached the status of proverbs. Mark Twain's *Library of Humor* of the late 19th century includes a story attributed to Hoja and indicates that Nasreddin Hoja stories also circulated in Baghdad. [1] There are several stories placing Nasreddin Hoja with Timur (in Western literature, mistakenly called Tamburlane, Tamarlane or other distortions) in Akshehir.[2]

According to one story, Timur had ordered his battle elephants to be quartered in the vicinity of his field quarters. Accordingly, one elephant was assigned to each nearby village. Since the elephants consume large amounts of food and are fond of tree barks, they began to inflict considerable damage to the crops, orchards and vineyards. The elders of a village, deciding

that they could no longer withstand the ruination, seek out Nasreddin Hoja and ask him to be their spokesman, to relay their wish to Timur that their elephant be withdrawn. Hoja agrees on one condition. The entire delegation is to accompany him to Timur's throne.

Members of the delegation agree. Hoja takes the lead, with the elders in tow, and they begin their trek to the encampment. As the delegation approaches the multitudes of guards, some of which are mounted, others on foot, in full battle gear and colorful attires, the members of the delegation begin to have second thoughts. One by one they begin deserting the procession. As Hoja approaches Timur's resplendent throne, he realizes that he is alone. Feeling betrayed and becoming furious, he proceeds nonetheless.

The Chamberlain announces Hoja. Timur queries majestically:

-- State your business.

After due and proper salutation, Hoja begins:

-- Your Highness, the residents of this village asked me to relay their highest respects to you. They are quartering one of your battle elephants, but they have a small worry.

-- May they be blessed. What is their worry?

-- Your Highness, they have noticed that the elephant in their charge appears to be unhappy with his lot. He may be suffering from loneliness. They desire a companion for him.

-- Let it be.

Timur seems pleased and orders a pouch of gold coins be given to Hoja. along with a new suit of clothes. Hoja leaves the Presence of Timur and on the way back, the delegation reassembles the way it dispersed. They are very curious of the outcome and wish to share in the good fortune of their Chief-Emissary. Hoja observes wryly:

-- You harvest what you sow.[3]

As Nasreddin Hoja becomes more known to Timur, he is invited to the Presence more often. At one point, Timur wishes to examine the tax records of the nearest town. The official in charge of the collection is brought before the throne and is asked to reconcile the revenues with the written record. The official is unable to please the sovereign. Timur orders:

-- Let him eat the tax books.

The Chamberlains tear the books and present it to the (now ex-official) for his culinary consumption. Timur gives another order:

-- Hoja, I hereby appoint you the new Tax Collector. Timur's word is law, permits no choice.

Time passes. Timur is desirous of investigating the performance of the newly appointed tax-officer. Nasreddin Hoja is sent for and enters the Presence with a stack of pide (flat bread) in his arms, with slender lines of accounts scribbled on them. Timur, recognizing the local staple food, thunders:

-- What insolence! You were ordered to appear with the tax books!

Hoja Responds:

-- Your Highness, these are the tax books. Might I not have to eat them?

Many other stories relate events closer to home. On one occasion, Hoja borrows a kazan (large cauldron) from his neighbor. When Hoja returns the kazan, the neighbor sees that there is a small cooking pot in the bottom. He asks Hoja:

-- What is this?

Hoja replies:

-- Apparently the kazan had been pregnant and it has given birth to this small pot.

The neighbor unquestioningly accepts the kazan and the pot.

Some weeks later, Hoja wishes to borrow the same kazan. The neighbor is only too happy to oblige. This time, a month passes. The neighbor calls on Hoja to inquire about his kazan. Hoja, with a concerned look, announces:

-- I am sorry, but your kazan died.

The neighbor is puled. Then becoming angry, he demands:

-- How could it die?

-- You believed that it gave birth, why do you not believe that it died?

The wit and wisdom of Nasreddin Hoja never leaves him tongue-tied. One day an illiterate man comes to Hoja with a letter he had received.

-- Hoja, please read this letter to me.

Hoja looks at the letter, but cannot make out a single word. So he tells the man.

-- I am sorry, but I cannot read this.

The man cries:

-- For shame, Hoja! You must be ashamed before the turban you wear (i.e. the sign of education)

Hoja removes the turban from his own head and places it on the head of the illiterate man, saying:

-- There, now you wear the turban. Read the letter yourself.

A final resting place was constructed for the "Hoja" in the vicinity of Akshehir, near present day Konya province in the Turkish Republic. This "tomb" is a most unusual and elegant structure. It is protected against the elements by a large diameter ribbed dome, supported by many slender columns. An imposing gate, leading to the area covered by this dome, is most visible. Two rectangular stone posts provide the anchor for the tastefully designed wrought-iron door. The two wings of the ornate gate are tightly shut and secured with an enormous padlock. However, there is no surrounding fence and the gate stands alone on its site.

The tradition demands telling seven anecdotes from Nasreddin Hoja, once his name is invoked. Due to space considerations, we will ask forgiveness from his soul and strive to mention his name in multiples of seven instead. I am certain he would have understood our exigencies.

The Journal *Molla Nasreddin*

The weekly journal carrying the name *Molla Nasreddin* appears to have exerted an enormous influence on its readership.[4] Several other periodicals, in other languages of the area, strove to emulate its style, philosophy and satire. *Molla Nasreddin* immediately attracted the attention of Western observers as well. Echoes of its contents can be gleaned from dozens of contemporary periodicals, in various languages.[5]

Moreover, the journal *Molla Nasreddin*, much like its name-sake, continues to maintain its relevance to the life of Azerbaijan and Central Asia in general. In the recent years, at least one attempt was made to re-publish the entire journal.[6] Even when these efforts to duplicate the entire collection in facsimiles have been truncated after the first few issues, the momentum

has not been lost. The contents of the remaining issues have found their way into various books.

The history of the journal *Molla Nasreddin*, as well as the biography of its founder-editor have also appeared in various editions. Even if the cartoons, which constituted an integral part of the journal, could not be reproduced in full as yet.

The founder of *Molla Nasreddin* was Jelil Memmedkuluzade (1866-1932).[7] He often signed his editorials with the pseudonym "*Molla Nasreddin*." Before discussing the message of the journal *Molla Nasreddin*, let us read the very first issue. It begins with an editorial.[8]

Tbilisi:

I am addressing you, my brothers. I am especially referring to those who do not like what I have to say, who make excuses in order not to hear my words; like going to have their horoscopes read; on their way to watch fighting dogs; to listen to the tales of the dervishes; to lay in the bath house and the like.

I persist, because sages pronounce: direct your words to those who do not listen to you.

You my brethren! There are times you heard humorous words from me, opened your mouths to the sky, closed your eyes and noisily laughed so hard that your intestines were almost torn, you used your skirts instead of towels to dry your eyes, faces, saying "damn the devil." But do not think that you are laughing at *Molla Nasreddin*.

You, my brethren! If you wish to know whom you are laughing at, then place a mirror in front of you and take a careful look to see your own faces.

I have completed what I wanted to say. On the other hand, I have an apology: forgive me, Turkish brethren, I am addressing you with the clear tongue of the Turks. I know that is shameful to be speaking in Turkish and it testifies to the lack of one's personal knowledge. However, it is necessary to recall the days past: remember those days when your mother rocked you in your crib, she sang to you lullabies in the Turkish language but you were not quieted. Then your poor mother said to you: "Son, do not cry, the bogeyman will come and take you away," and you stopped for fear of your life.

Every now and then in order to recall the beautiful days gone by, what shame is there in speaking the Mother tongue?

-- (Signed) *Molla Nasreddin*.

Admonitions To Those Wishing To Subscribe To Our Journal:

First of all--it is necessary for you to ask God to grant his permission, to be revealed to you through a dream or omen.

Second--you must write to our office with a reed pen and in Tabriz ink. By no means use an iron pen and Russian ink.

Third--do not permit the hands of the postal clerks to touch the (subscription) money you will be sending. Because if their hands have sweated, the money may be wet. If this rule is observed, it will not be necessary to wash the money with water at the office.

Fourth--Write your letters in such a fashion that they do not contain a single Turkish word: it is a shame to write in Turkish and implies that your education is lacking.

Fifth and lastly--During the days listed below, we do not deem it proper for you to become customers. Any business undertaken during such days will bring no good: 1. The 3rd, 5th, 13th, 16th, 21st, 24th, 25th days of each month are inauspicious. We deem it right to record

subscriptions during these days. 2. We do not regard Tuesdays and Wednesdays as appropriate days for customers. 3. Each month, 28th and 29th days are the Days of Light --it is not permitted to begin a new endeavor. 4. Two days each month the moon is in Scorpio --do not become customer and do not begin a good deed. 5. Twelve days each month are regarded as the period of Eight Stars. Do not begin a new task on those days.

Telegrams Of *Molla Nasreddin*:

Petersburg--March 30. All Russia is quiet and peaceful. The wolf and the sheep are grazing together.

Tehran--March 29. His Excellency the Shah is preparing for an European trip.

Tabriz--March 30. Freedom is promised to the people: for example, the government will not stop the militia (serbaz) engaging in "livering" (jigerjilik --to buy, stroke, sell liver, or --colloquial-- more likely in this context: extortion of the highest order), butchery and begging.

Petersburg--March 30. It is said that Senator Cherivanskii will be appointed as the Orenburg Mufti (head of the Moslem Spiritual Board there). The Orenburg Mufti His Majesty Sultanov will become a servant of the Orenburg Police.

Shemakhi--30 March. Moslems are progressing. A Russian pharmacist has been granted permission to open a reading room (where tea and coffee are also served) so that nothing in Turkish could be read there.

Nakchevan--30 March. Cossacks are hoping that the Governor-General would become their patron and allocate them plenty of jobs.

Tabriz--30 March. Haji Gurban's sugar car was destroyed by fire. The loss is estimated to be two millions.

News That Ought To Be Known:

Molla Nasreddin vows to send the journal until the new year to those individuals who can write answers to us on the following questions:

1. Why is that, in whose main school, only one out of twelve illiterate Moslem teachers can write his name despite purposeful groan and gruntings?
2. In order for a Shi'i to drink water from a cup, which has been used by a Sunni for the same purpose, why is it necessary to wash the cup first?
3. Which is more plentiful: Stars in the sky or the gambling places in a Moslem bazaar?
4. How can the bereaved wives of (recently) dead men prevent the mollas from forcibly entering the house to partake in the ceremonial meal given in honor of the departed?
5. How could necessary books be procured so that Moslem boys can be taught in Turkish?
6. Which country's enterprises are producing laziness and lack of ambition?
7. How is it that the snakes arriving in boxes from Iran do not bite others besides the people of Iran?
8. What kind of secret is it that the government soldiers wounded during the Armenian fights are reprimanded so severely that the doctors are not permitting them to return to their duties?
9. Where did the 400 rubles, collected in the theatrical society in Yerevan and earmarked for the people of Ushi, depart?

Words Of The Forefathers:

There is no better keepsake in the world than sayings. Because earthly possessions can be squandered but the words remain. Words of the past rulers and poets are still enduring. Accordingly, experiences and proverbs, proven by trial and experiences from the Turkish rulers are written in our journal under "Words Of The Forefathers" so that our readers may make use of them at necessary times and places.[9]

-- If you tie one of your horses next to another, the Khan will observe this and say: "Why do you not give me one?"

-- At a place where there are possessions from your ancestors, it is forbidden for you to personally to earn.

-- The death of a man causes the idle to rejoice.

-- Do not trust the horse or the woman --tie them up and lock the door.

-- The hungry chicken dreams of Pilaf (rice dish).

-- Nobody dies of hunger --do not commit a mistake by giving away bread.

-- An open mouth does not remain hungry --may God grant abundance to the dust of our roads.

-- Leave the chores of the evening to morning and those of morning to evening.

-- Man becomes a scholar by remaining idle.

-- Things are said to a man a thousand times. If he is not persuaded, he is blameless.

-- There is no remedy to what is going to happen. Let it happen.

Molla Nasreddin's Mailbox:

In Baku--to his majesty Molla G. zade:

We can answer your question only in the following manner: Senator Cherivanskii's memorandum concerning the Spiritual Board has not been approved. However, according to information reaching us, the Head of the Moslem Spiritual Board will be subjected to an examination by the Tbilisi Exarch (Leader of the Gregorian Church) to prove his credentials of Religious Jurisprudence and then will have to be approved by the police authorities.

In Yerevan--to his majesty Ismail Bey Sefibeyov:

We are very pleased to receive your hearty congratulations regarding the publication of the first issue of our journal. We are not able to publish the poems you sent us in our previous number. However, we promise to include them in the next...

Commentary--

The first number adhered to a specific "content plan" which the editor was required to submit, before publication, for approval by the authorities.[10] It was as follows: 1. Friendly conversations

2. Satire (atmaca--one meaning is hunting bird, the haws; it is also means to nudge by words, in verse or prose, "thrown" at individuals or groups to get their attention with a view to engaging them in dialogue)

3. Commentary

4. Humorous poems

5. Humorous telegrams

6. Satirical stories

7. Jokes

8.	Post	Box
9.	Humorous	adverts
10.	Personal	ads
11. Cartoons and illustrations		

Several items on this list were not translated above; most important are cartoons, satirical verses and serialized satirical works. A few words about them is in order.

The cartoons appearing in the first issue, which unfortunately cannot be reproduced here, were no less satirical than other comments. They carried short subtitles and initially were largely the work of Smerdling (1877-1938), an experienced German artist working in Tbilisi. Another cartoonist was Rotter. Later on, native cartoonists joined the staff.[11]

Satire in verse was just as important. Mirza Elekber Sabir (1862-1911) was an early contributor to *Molla Nasreddin* in this genre. Sabir also wrote for numerous other serials and desired the publication of his collected works to be issued in a volume. In one of his last letters to a friend, A. Sehhat in Tbilisi, Sabir wrote: "If I die, I will not go in vain; because I know that you will publish my works." His friends honored Sabir's wish. His collected writings were issued under the title Hop-Hopname (i.e. to jump up and down).[12]

Another important contributor to *Molla Nasreddin* was Ali Nazmi (1878-1946). Like sabir, Nazmi also specialized in verse-satire and published his works in various humorous- satirical journals of the time. Very much in line with Memmedkuluzade's philosophy and approach, Nazmi also made light of superstition. The target was the local population. He strove to get and hold attention of the Turkish community for the purpose of introducing the readership to the contemporary worldly events.[13]

In addition, Memmedkuluzade did not hesitate to include serialized stories or novels in *Molla Nasreddin*. One such prominent work was Ibrahim Beyin Seyahatnamesi: veyâ, Taassubkeshlîgin Belasi (Travelogue of Ibrahim Bey: or, the Curse of Bigotry), an enormously popular novel of the time. It was written by Zeynelabidin Maraghai (1837-1910), a merchant of Azerbaijan origin (born in Maragha, died in Istanbul), for a time living and successfully trading in Yalta.

This satirical multi-volume novel and its author has attracted wide attention with the anonymous publication of its first volume sometime between 1888 and 1897; apparently in Cairo. The second volume was printed in Calcutta during 1907 and the third volume in Istanbul in 1909. The first volume was at least translated once, into German, in 1903 and issued in Leipzig. As the premier editions of each were quickly sold-out, reprintings rapidly appeared in various locations, including Calcutta, Cairo and Istanbul.

All three volumes were merged into one and issued in Baku during 1911. Extracts from this novel were included in the pages of at least a dozen journals and newspapers in almost as many cities --on two continents-- throughout the first decade of the 20th century. Its contents must be read with the Iranian Constitutional Movement of 1905-1911 in mind. Reflecting the ever growing interest in those events, *Molla Nasreddin* included sections of the Seyahatname in five different issues of 1906.[14]

Direction and Objectives of the Journal *Molla Nasreddin*

Memmedkuluzade had in mind several goals in publishing *Molla Nasreddin*. Some are clearly stated or readily recognizable even after eight decades after their publication. Those are discussed below. Some remarks are not so readily deciphered. This is solely due to our lack of complete knowledge of the daily news. Mirahmadov writes:

We learn, from Memmedkuluzade's memoirs, that one of the matters which occupied him was the problem of the readers. Through *Molla Nasreddin's* persona he wrote: "with various excuses, the brethren were running away from him, not prepared to attach any value to his words and paid no attention to newspaper or journal reading." Therefore one of the objectives of *Molla Nasreddin* was to introduce the native population to pay attention to the press and its contents so as to sensitize them to world developments. In order to be as effective as possible, Memmedkuluzade even "read the contents of the issue to many individuals prior to committing them to print." so as to try them on a sample readership.[15]

Memmedkuluzade's language policy was an important part of his message to his readers and is announced in the opening editorial. The policy was very much like that of Ismail Gaspirali, as utilized in his newspaper *Tercuman* (published in Bakhchesaray). Memmedkuluzade, like Gaspirali, was going to write in the clear Turkish mother tongue. He ridiculed those who looked down upon the use of Turkish. His jibes may have been aimed at the mollahs using Persian or Arabic, but was more likely directed at those who cavalierly used Russian.[16]

The section "Admonitions To Those Wishing To Subscribe To Our Journal" represents a typical use of humor to make fun of behavior which the journal seeks to change. In the list of admonitions, the journal ridicules waiting for "signs" before taking action; the belief in "inauspicious" days as dictated by superstition or astrology; the use of Turkish; and even (Admonition 2) the attachment to Iran or to the past simply because it is the past ("the ink and pen do not matter as much as the use to which they are put" is perhaps the message). Lastly, all possible or imaginary reasons to avoid subscribing are hereby quashed by sharp sarcasm.

"News That Ought To Be Known" hints at several controversial issues of the day --the decline of the mekteb education and the low educational level of the mollahs who taught in them (Item 1); the need for education in the native language (Item 5) by qualified instructors (Item 1); the rapacity of the mollahs (Item 4) and general malaise in society; sectarian divisions and their most minute implications (Item 2); the authorities' complicity in communal clashes (Item 8); the dishonesty of "charitable" work (Item 9).[17]

Throughout the journal, the use of double, triple reversed or opposite meanings delivers a clear message with heightened emphasis. In the "Telegrams," the first is a clear example making use of such an exaggerated claim (referring to the Empire's quiescence) that only its opposite can be understood. This "innocent" statement belies official insistence that peace prevails. Word Choice may be used in the same way. The Third Telegram illustrates the point. The word "jigerjilik" has an innocuous connotation (as sheep liver, prepared in a particular way, is a delicacy), in addition to the bloody context which is actually intended. Both that "Telegram" and the other from Tabriz must be read within the context of the Iranian Constitutional Movement between 1905-1911, in which Tabriz was a major center of opposition to the Shah. The "serbaz" refer, apparently, to the Shah's forces' behavior in Tabriz. "Haji Gurban's sugar car having been destroyed by fire" also seems to contain more than one message. First of all, "gurban" is the sacrificial sheep. This person may or may not have been a real individual. Secondly, the Shah's bastinadoing of the Tehran sugar merchants in December 1906 is considered the event that set off the movement, sometimes called a resolution.[18] The seemingly mysterious "loss of two millions" without providing a unit of measure reinforces the message.

In the category of "Word Of The Forefathers" *Molla Nasreddin* takes a predictable turn. Almost all of the proverbs retain the traditional, easily recognized format, but the messages are twisted "backwards." What seems incongruous at first sight, is indeed incredulous. By means of this simple device, *Molla Nasreddin* accomplishes the task of nailing down the real message all the while forcing the readers to think again. It is also noteworthy that the

reference to the "Turkish Rulers of the Past" is very reminiscent of Kultigin tablets and Kutadgu Bilig.

Finally, the "Mailbox" catches the unwary reader off guard. In this, the first issue, the writer states, "Molla Nasreddin was unable to publish a letter in its previous issue!" Also, Memmedkuluzade furnishes some background to the Telegram concerning the Orenburg Mufti. Like so many other allusions in the journal, this referred to a long-standing debate concerning the appointment of the Mufti of Orenburg and the degree of his subordination to civil authorities. This issue received detailed coverage in the Caucasus because of the implications of its outcome for appointments in the Sunni and Shi'i Spiritual Boards in Tbilisi.

Memmedkuluzade apparently chose satire as the educational and political vehicle, both for its power and to circumvent the restrictions of tsarist censorship. Imperial Russia's strict censorship laws, even when relaxed for Russians and other Christian populations, were maintained for Turkish populations. These laws were aimed at control generally and sometimes at Russification and Christianization. Later, the modified laws were used for political control.[19] Zeynelabidin Maraghai may have published his highly acclaimed multi-volume novel outside the Russian Empire due to such considerations[20]

The use of satire as a political tool has a long history in the Turkish domains of Central Asia. Throughout the ages, satirical poetry has been used by many historical Central Asian authors as a platform. Alishir Navai, Shibani, Yesevi are only some of the more prominent practitioners of this genre.

Molla Nasreddin was widely quoted and "talked about" in other contemporary journals, magazines and newspapers of the time. According to Gulam Memmedli, at least 150 such publications carried quotations or extracts from *Molla Nasreddin*. [21]

The wide popularity and republication of *Molla Nasreddin* in the early 20th century (alluded to above) testifies not only to the power and relevance of its message, but to the shared common culture and language across Central Asia. An overwhelming majority of the following publications which quoted from *Molla Nasreddin* were in various Turkish dialects:

Turk Yurdu[22]; Gaspirali's Tercuman in Bakchesaray; Jahan in Tashkent; Ulfet in St. Petersburg; Adalet in Tehran; Turkmenistan In Ashkabat; Hablulmetin in Calcutta; Tenbih in Tabriz; Hurriyet in Samarkand; Uklar in Uralks, and scores of others in the cities named as well as in Baku, Istanbul, Tbilisi, Moscow, Ufa, Yerevan and the *Revue du Monde Musulman* in Paris.

Present-Day Reflections in Central Asia

The present-day Central Asians are also following in the same path, adapting the traditions to the conditions of the day. They employ the cartoon[23] genre as a vehicle of local political expression.

A case in point are the two cartoons which were published in the journal *Muhbir*. This publication is aimed at Ozbek journalists, the masthead of which indicates it is the organ of the Central Committee of the Ozbek Writers Union:[24]

A haggard looking man, (purposely) reminiscent of a dock-side "tough" in a southern French port, with his beard in stubble, is standing in front of a bookstore. He is wearing a French beret, smoking the butt of a cigarette holding open the left side of his jacket. Inside his jacket, large pockets holding some unspecified books are visible. The caption reads: "Branch of the bookstore." This cartoon was re-published in the West.[25]

In another cartoon in the same journal, a librarian, with the appropriately serious look on his face, is depositing books into a large strong-box, placed in the middle of the library, through a slot on top. The strong-box is secured tight with an enormous padlock. The caption reads: "The booklover." [26]

Like the materials in *Molla Nasreddin*, these cartoons may not reveal their full glory at first sight. Only after an examination of contemporary literature in the environs they were published we may begin to appreciate their meanings and ironies. As these cartoons are of 1980s vintage, this is not very difficult. [27]

Hence, *Molla Nasreddin* is not only a bearer of political and social messages of the early 20th century, it is but a one example taken from a long line of political and social satire in Central Asia. The tradition is centuries old and still in use today. There is continuity of form and, often, of spirit. Both are still relevant and more importantly, are taken seriously.

NOTES:

1. See Samuel Langhorne Clemens, William Dean Howells, Charles Hopkins Clark, *Mark Twain's Library of Humor* (New York, 1887).

2. If the encounter of these historical figures is a historical fact, the time must have been after Timur had defeated the Ottoman Sultan Yildirim Bayazit ("Bayazit the Thunderbolt") in the last decade of the 14th century.

3. "Ne ekersen, o'nu bicersin."

4. The journal *Molla Nasreddin* also attracted the attention of a number of authors and scholars publishing in the West. Among the most prominent, see J. Hajibeyli, "The Origins of the National Press in Azerbaijan" *Asiatic Review* (1930); A. Bennigsen Molla "Nasreddin et la presses satirique musulmane de Russie avant 1917" *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 3, 1962/3; A. Bennigsen and C. Lemerrier-Quellejay, *La Presse et les mouvement national chez le Musulmans Russie avant 1920*. (Paris, 1964).

5. Gulam Memmedli, *Molla Nasreddin* (Baku, 1984). Apparently, this is the second edition of the 1966 printing. Memmedli provides such day-by-day comments, appearing in at least 150 publications, published in the Russian empire, which quoted *Molla Nasreddin* throughout its publication span.

6. Our sample owes its existence to those efforts.

7. Transliterated from the original Azerbaijan Turkish. For details of his life, see Memmedli.

8. The journal *Molla Nasreddin*, 7 April 1906, Number 1. First editorial is also signed "*Molla Nasreddin*." (Written by Jelil Memmedkuluzade).

9. This is very reminiscent of the admonitions contained in Orkhon tablets (c. 732 AD) and *Kutadgu Bilig* (c. 1069 AD). By the time *Molla Nasreddin* began publication, both the Orkhon tablets and *Kutadgu Bilig* were widely translated and available in various languages in Europe and Asia. For example, the following is from the Kultigin funerary monuments (early 8th c, which constitute a portion of the Orkhon tablets) which goes on to enumerate further events of the time:

They (the Turkish Kagans --rulers) settled the Turkish people Eastward up to the Khinghan mountains and Westward as far as the Iron Gate. They ruled (organizing) the Kok (Blue) Turks between the two (boundaries). Wise Kagans were they, brave Kagans were they. Their buyruqs (that is, high officials), too were wise and brave, indeed.

See Talat Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Bloomington, 1968). Pp. 263-4.

Furthermore, Balasagunlu Yusuf's *Kutadgu Bilig* (c. 1069 AD) echoes and indeed paraphrases the Orkhon tablets:

If you observe well you will notice that the Turkish princes are the finest in the world. And among these Turkish princes the one of the outstanding fame and glory was Tonga Alp Er. He was the choicest of men, distinguished by great wisdom and virtues manifold.

Kutadgu Bilig was also translated into English. See R. Dankoff, *Wisdom of Royal Glory: Kutadgu Bilig* (Chicago, 1983). P. 48.

10. Aziz Mirahmadov, *Azerbaijan Molla Nasreddin'i* (Baku 1980). Pp. 241-242. For the implications of the phrase "approved by the authorities, see H. B. Paksoy, "Chora Batir: A Tatar Admonition to Future Generations." *Studies in Comparative Communism* (Los Angeles/London) Vol. XIX, Nos. 3 and 4, Autumn/Winter 1986. Ibid., pp. 253-265; for an outline of the Russian empire censorship laws and sources.

11. Smerdling's and other *Molla Nasreddin* cartoonists' biographies are also found in Mirahmadov (1980).

12. Memed Memmedov, Editor, *Hop-Hopname* (Baku, 1980). Apparently, this is at least the third publication of Hop-Hopname. As we learn from the introduction by Memmedov, Hop-Hopname was first issued in 1912. The second printing appears to have been made between 1962 and 1965, issued under the auspices of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.

13. Firidun Huseyinov, Editor, *Ali Nazmij, Secilmis Eserleri* (Baku, 1979).

14. Zeynelabidin Maraghai, *Ibrahim Beyin Seyahatnamesi veya Taasubkesliyin Belasi*. (Baku, 1982), pp. 9-10. *Molla Nasreddin* included selected sections of this novel in its nos. 9, 15, 17, 23 and 36 of 1906.

15. Mirahmadov (1980), Pp 243-244.

16. This issue was much debated in the press of the Caucasus. See, for example, a commentary signed "Daghestani" in *Kaspîi* (Baku) 20 April 1913, cited in Audrey L. Altstadt, "Azerbaijani Turks' Response to Conquest" *Studies in Comparative Communism* (Los Angeles/London) Vol. XIX, Nos. 3 and 4, Autumn/Winter 1986.

17. Item 7 perhaps refers to spies sent to report on the tens of thousands of Iranian Azerbaijanis working North of the border.

18. For a discussion of the Iranian Constitutional Movement in Tabriz, see Nariman Allamoglu Hasanov, *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Tebrize v 1905-1911 gg.* (Baku, 1975).

19. See note 10 above. The problem of the spread of the use of Russian among Azerbaijani Turks and of the so-called "russification" of that dialect was discussed in the first Muslim Teachers Conference in Baku in the summer of 1906. See Altstadt, "The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie and the Cultural- Enlightenment Movement in Baku: First Steps Towards Nationalism" Ronald G. Suny, Editor, *Transcaucasia; Nationalism and Social Change* (Ann Arbor, 1983).

20. Other prominent political and literary figures of the period published "controversial" works outside the Russian empire. Gaspirali and Yusuf Akchura, for example, published in the Cairo newspaper *Turk items* that would have been unlikely to clear the censors in the tsarist domains.

21. See Note 5 above. This volume is devoted solely to a chronological documentation of these "quotations" of the journal *Molla Nasreddin*.

22. See H. B. Paksoy, "Nationality and Religion: Three Observations from Omer Seyfettin." *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford) Vol. 3, N. 3, 1985. Pp. 109-115, to place Turk Yurdu in perspective.
23. As the word cartoon was derived from the Italian "caricare," originally meaning "to load a weapon," a term devised during the revolutionary fervor of 1830s Europe, the implications are bound to be more colorful. See James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men* (London, 1980), Pp. 314- 315.
24. There are sister publications in every "republic" in Central Asia.
25. See H. B. Paksoy, "Deceivers" *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford) Vol. 3, N. 1, 1984. The referenced cartoon originally appeared in *Muhbir* dated February 1983 and is duplicated at the end of the cited paper.
26. This second cartoon appears to be in the same mold as the preceding one, was published in the same journal, the same year, addressing the same or similar issues.
27. See the "Deceivers," referenced above, for possible origins of the political events.