

SOCIAL CRITICISM, MORAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND HUMAN VALUES IN SAID AHMAD'S SHORT STORIES "THE BURDEN" AND "THE STUBBORN MAN"

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Abstract. This article explores the artistic, social, and philosophical dimensions of Said Ahmad's short stories *The Burden* and *The Stubborn Man*. Through a comparative literary analysis, the study examines the portrayal of human responsibility, moral values, social criticism, and the consequences of selfishness and wasteful traditions. Special attention is given to the characters of Obban and Juma Ota, who represent two contrasting models of human behavior. The article analyzes symbolism, realism, irony, characterization, and the authors' social message. The findings reveal that both stories expose significant social problems while promoting humanity, responsibility, and ethical awareness.

Keywords: Said Ahmad, social criticism, comparative analysis, Obban, Juma Ota, morality, responsibility, symbolism, realism, Uzbek literature.

СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ КРИТИКА, НРАВСТВЕННАЯ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ И ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИЕ ЦЕННОСТИ В РАССКАЗАХ САИДА АХМАДА «ГРУЗ» И «УПРЯМЕЦ»

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуются художественные, социальные и философские аспекты рассказов Саида Ахмада «Груз» и «Упрямец». На основе сравнительного литературного анализа рассматриваются проблемы человеческой ответственности, нравственных ценностей, социальной критики, а также последствия эгоизма и расточительных традиций. Особое внимание уделяется образам Оббана и Джумы Ота, которые представляют две противоположные модели человеческого поведения. В статье анализируются символизм, реализм, ирония, художественное создание характеров и социальное послание автора. Результаты исследования показывают, что оба рассказа раскрывают важные социальные проблемы и одновременно пропагандируют гуманизм, ответственность и нравственное сознание.

Ключевые слова: Саид Ахмад, социальная критика, сравнительный анализ, Оббан, Джума Ота, мораль, ответственность, символизм, реализм, узбекская литература.

Introduction. Among the prominent representatives of modern Uzbek literature, Said Ahmad occupies a distinguished position due to his ability to combine artistic mastery with deep social observation. His short stories often focus on ordinary people and everyday situations, yet they reveal profound ethical, psychological, and philosophical issues. Through realistic characters and vivid situations, the writer criticizes social injustice, moral decline, hypocrisy, and harmful traditions while promoting humanity, responsibility, and compassion.

Two notable examples of Said Ahmad's artistic achievement are the short stories *The Burden* and *The Stubborn Man*. Although these works differ in plot and setting, both address fundamental questions concerning the relationship between the individual and society. In *The Burden*, the author examines selfishness, moral indifference, and social irresponsibility through the image of Obban. In *The Stubborn Man*, he criticizes excessive funeral traditions and their economic consequences through the character of Juma Ota. The significance of these stories lies not only in their artistic qualities but also in their social relevance. Both works reveal the challenges faced by ordinary people and expose attitudes that hinder social progress. Therefore, a comparative analysis of these narratives provides valuable insight into Said Ahmad's worldview and literary craftsmanship.

Research methodology. The present study employs several literary approaches, including comparative analysis, psychological criticism, social criticism, and artistic interpretation. These methods enable a comprehensive examination of the characters, themes, symbols, and ideological messages presented in both stories.

Comparative analysis is used to identify similarities and differences between the protagonists, social issues, and artistic techniques. Psychological criticism helps reveal the internal motivations of the main characters, while social criticism highlights the authors' evaluation of social practices and moral attitudes.

Said Ahmad's Artistic Style. One of the defining characteristics of Said Ahmad's prose

is realism. Unlike writers who rely heavily on fantasy or idealized portrayals, Said Ahmad focuses on ordinary situations that readers can easily recognize. His characters are drawn from everyday life, making his works both accessible and convincing. Another important feature of his writing is the combination of humor and criticism. The author often employs irony and satire to expose social shortcomings. Readers may initially smile at certain situations, but beneath the humor lies a serious critique of society.

The language of Said Ahmad's stories is simple, expressive, and rich in national color. His use of folk wisdom, proverbs, and colloquial speech strengthens the authenticity of his narratives and deepens their emotional impact.

Analysis of "The Burden" Plot and Composition

The plot of *The Burden* unfolds within the confined space of a train compartment. This limited setting allows the author to concentrate on interpersonal relationships and social behavior.

The exposition introduces the passengers and establishes the social environment. The conflict emerges through Obban's selfish actions and his disregard for the needs of others. The climax occurs when his behavior becomes a source of tension and criticism among fellow passengers. The resolution suggests a symbolic purification of society once the negative influence represented by Obban disappears. The compact structure of the story demonstrates Said Ahmad's ability to convey complex ideas through simple narrative situations.

Obban as a Symbol of Social Selfishness

Obban is one of the most memorable negative characters in modern Uzbek prose. Although he possesses a university education and professional qualifications, he lacks empathy and moral responsibility. His physical appearance reflects his internal character. The description of his thick neck and rough behavior symbolizes stubbornness and spiritual blindness. The author deliberately contrasts Obban's educational achievements with his ethical deficiencies to emphasize that knowledge without morality is meaningless.

Throughout the story, Obban prioritizes his own comfort over the well-being of others. His behavior demonstrates a complete lack of social consciousness. He behaves as if society exists solely to satisfy his needs. From a broader perspective, Obban symbolizes individuals who consume social benefits without contributing positively to the community. Through this image, the author criticizes selfishness, greed, and moral indifference.

Symbolism of the Train

The train serves as the central symbol of the story. It represents society moving toward a collective destination. Each passenger symbolizes a member of the social community. Their interactions reflect broader social relationships. Obban represents the negative forces that hinder social progress, while the other passengers embody public conscience and moral judgment. The movement of the train symbolizes development and advancement. Consequently, the narrative suggests that society can progress only when selfish attitudes are challenged and ethical values are upheld.

Analysis of "The Stubborn Man"

Plot and Composition

Unlike *The Burden*, which focuses on social interaction, *The Stubborn Man* centers on the internal struggle of an elderly man confronting death. The story begins with Juma Ota's illness and the expectation of his approaching death. However, rather than concentrating on physical suffering, the narrative focuses on his concern for the financial burden that funeral ceremonies would place upon his family.

The conflict develops through his reflections on social customs and economic realities. The climax occurs when his determination to protect his family outweighs his readiness to accept death. The conclusion presents a triumph of life, responsibility, and practical wisdom.

Juma Ota as a Symbol of Responsibility

Juma Ota represents a completely different model of human behavior from Obban. He is neither wealthy nor highly educated. Nevertheless, he possesses qualities that define true humanity: responsibility, dignity, and self-sacrifice. Even while facing death, his primary concern remains the welfare of his family.

His determination to continue living is not motivated by fear but by responsibility. He understands that his death would impose severe economic difficulties upon those he loves. The author portrays Juma Ota as a morally admirable figure whose strength comes from ethical commitment rather than physical power.

Criticism of Wasteful Traditions

One of the major themes of the story is the criticism of expensive funeral customs. Through irony and humor, the author exposes how traditions such as memorial feasts and ceremonial gatherings create financial burdens for ordinary families. The image of a dying man calculating funeral expenses reveals the absurdity of social expectations. This criticism does not target cultural values themselves but rather the excessive forms they sometimes assume. The story encourages readers to reconsider traditions that place unnecessary pressure on individuals and families.

Comparative Character Analysis

The central contrast between the two stories is embodied in their protagonists.

Obban represents selfishness, while Juma Ota represents responsibility.

Obban is educated but morally weak. Juma Ota is ordinary yet ethically strong.

Obban thinks primarily about himself, whereas Juma Ota constantly considers the needs of others.

Obban becomes a burden upon society, while Juma Ota serves as a source of support for his family and community.

Through these contrasting figures, Said Ahmad explores two opposing approaches to life. One is based on selfishness and personal comfort; the other is founded upon sacrifice and responsibility.

Social and Philosophical Interpretation

Both stories address important philosophical questions regarding human existence and social responsibility. The first story asks whether education alone can make a person truly human. Through Obban, the author provides a negative answer. Knowledge without morality produces individuals who may be professionally successful but socially harmful. The second story asks whether social traditions always serve human needs. Through Juma Ota's experience, the author demonstrates that certain customs can become burdensome when they lose their original purpose. Together, the stories suggest that ethical values should guide both personal behavior and social practices.

Contemporary Relevance

Although written in a different historical context, the themes explored in these stories remain highly relevant today. Modern societies continue to struggle with selfishness, social inequality, materialism, and excessive social expectations. Individuals similar to Obban can still be found in contemporary life, as can families facing difficulties caused by expensive ceremonies and social obligations.

For this reason, the stories retain their educational and moral significance. Their messages transcend time and place, addressing universal concerns about responsibility, justice, and human dignity.

Conclusion. The comparative analysis of *The Burden* and *The Stubborn Man* demonstrates Said Ahmad's remarkable ability to transform ordinary situations into profound reflections on society and human nature.

Through Obban, the author criticizes selfishness, greed, and moral irresponsibility. Through Juma Ota, he celebrates responsibility, sacrifice, and genuine humanity. While the stories address different social problems, they share a common ethical message: a healthy society depends upon compassion, moral awareness, and concern for others.

The enduring relevance of these works confirms Said Ahmad's status as one of the most significant voices in modern Uzbek literature. His stories continue to inspire readers to reflect critically upon their own values and responsibilities while encouraging positive social change.

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