



THE UNIQUENESS OF THE DEPICTION OF HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL REALITY IN IQBOL MIRZO'S NOVEL "BONU"

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Abstract. *This article focuses on the development of epistolary works in world literary studies, particularly examining novels and exploring their potential to be perceived as a form of literary art. Reflections are presented on the distinctive features of the epistolary genre, such as its ability to depict historical–social and domestic reality through an individual perspective and reveal the hero's fate and human psychology within historical events.*

Keywords: *Epistolary, letter, message, lyrical, elegy, rhetoric, correspondence, treatise, baroque.*

Introduction. Epistolary novels are typically characterized by romantic–sentimental themes and consist of correspondence between lovers. However, depending on the author's ideological and artistic intent, these correspondences can also depict broader social realities. Essentially, the specificity of the novel as a genre lies in reflecting political, social, and moral issues through the adventures of its characters or a concentrically structured plot set against the backdrop of a particular historical period. This is evident in any outstanding work of world literature. Accordingly, presenting a novel in an epistolary format does not drastically alter this specific feature of the genre. Observations show that “Bonu” can fully be considered a social novel because the author evaluates the historical–social period through Bonu's adventures.

Literature Review. Iqbol Mirzo's novel “Bonu” was written with the ideological and artistic purpose of portraying the social reality of a specific period

in national history. For this, the writer selects a young woman, Bonu, as the main character.

Research Methodology. The depiction of social life begins with students preparing to participate in cotton harvesting. The author realistically portrays the injustice that oppressed the entire population—from leaders to schoolchildren—over decades, reflected in Bonu’s student life. At the time, cotton was instilled as a sacred symbol in people’s minds, and the cotton plant was elevated to a divine status. Bonu studies at a college and plans to top up her mobile phone before leaving for the harvest. These small details indicate that the events occur during the years of independence since neither colleges nor mobile phones existed during the Soviet era. Thus, Iqbol Mirzo was among the first authors to highlight the negative realities of the post-independence period, including the lingering dominance of cotton monoculture.

Although “Bonu” is written in an epistolary form, it more closely resembles traditional epic prose. Events are presented in such detail, including minor nuances and fully developed dialogues, that it gives the impression of Bonu writing a daily journal rather than short letters through the Telegram social network. It seems as though she has written a full-length novel in the form of a diary and sent it piece by piece to the writer via Telegram. In this work, traditional prose methods dominate rather than conventional letter templates.

The novel begins with scenes of domestic life, Bonu’s memories, love struggles, and family conflicts but transitions to depicting significant social realities of the nation against the backdrop of Bonu’s life. Through the experiences of a single woman, the author introduces a major historical period and the critical social events of that era into the sphere of artistic thought.

Following her father’s death, Bonu’s brother decides to sell their grandfather’s house, citing the need to repay his debts. “My husband earned this money in Russia,” says the brother’s wife, introducing the theme of labor migration into the novel.

Unemployment and poverty force the brother to seek work abroad. Meanwhile, household expenses and endless social obligations, such as funerals, religious gatherings, and traditional events, further worsen the family's economic situation.

Overall, relationships within the family, often driven by material concerns, are perceived as a significant social tragedy in the national context. Bonu's brother deceives his mother and sister over money and abandons them. Relatives treat Bonu and her mother based only on personal interest, either positively, negatively, or indifferently. Material interests also drive Olmos to cause Bonu immense suffering. Why? Why have the people of our time—descendants of a spiritually and culturally elevated nation—become so materialistic and morally degraded? Why do seemingly educated individuals act with such ignorance? A century ago, the Jadid intellectuals sharply criticized ignorance, the irresponsibility of the wealthy, wasteful celebrations, the lack of pursuit for secular knowledge, and the corruption and indulgence of officials, wealthy individuals, and even religious leaders. They argued that these issues were leading the nation toward devastation, backwardness, and decline.

The events of "Bonu" show that, even a hundred years later, the overall national situation has remained almost unchanged, with modern challenges like labor migration, deceit, and fraud adding to the mix.

Superstition is also depicted as a social tragedy in the novel. The excessive ceremonies following the father's death, the events at the shrine of Khoja Ubbon Avliyo, the healers who treat with dried snakes and scorpions, others who use herbs, and rituals involving the slaughter of white and black goats all serve as warnings to the reader that ignorance remains a powerful force. At first glance, it seems unbelievable that such events occurred in recent years. Of course, there is also the phenomenon of a drowning man clutching at straws. In other words, the unfortunate sick, who are faced with incurable diseases, are ready to try anything—right or wrong. When a person is entirely helpless and hopeless, it is natural for them to act

irrationally or do things they once condemned; this may seem like an event unrelated to society. However, a person's descent into hopelessness is subtly connected to the general state of society. Even Bonu, a pious, educated girl knowledgeable about modern sciences, is unable to overcome those superstitions—not only because of her individual circumstances or character traits but also because of the beliefs subtly ingrained in her consciousness and genetics by society. For centuries, colonial rule, poverty, oppression, tyranny, monarchy, and authoritarianism have gradually, systematically, and imperceptibly planted dangerous vices into people's minds, such as hopelessness, lack of self-confidence, reliance on invisible forces, inaction, a sense of powerlessness in the face of fate and authority, and the resulting apathy, fear, and hypocrisy. These deep-rooted ills cannot be quickly eradicated from people's minds through four or five years of university education, a few years of independence, or the brief period of religious freedom granted by independence. Iqbol Mirzo masterfully portrays such seemingly simple yet devastatingly difficult—to-eradicate vices and tragedies through real-life events. Through Ikromiddin's case, the author highlights the trauma that society leaves on human consciousness and the social disintegration that alters the “genetic code” of individuals.

The tragedies that Bonu experiences and witnesses are interconnected like a chain. Officials and wealthy businessmen, who twist societal reforms for their own benefit, use money and power to push honest entrepreneurs out of the way. This reflects the historical reality of the period depicted in the novel. Even Ikromiddin, who selflessly helps Bonu, falls victim to one such greedy official. “I will appeal to the capital; they will uphold justice...” says the character, but he is imprisoned for many years on false charges. His family loses everything and falls into poverty. Injustice in high circles and courts, psychological pressure, hopelessness, and the loss of faith in justice compel honest, law-abiding characters to seek illegal solutions—trying to resolve issues by bribing someone. However, fraudsters who exploit the lack of faith in the rule of law and the triumph of truth have already

formed in society. Bonu and Shoirra fall victim to such fraudsters, losing the money they earned through hard labor, sweat, and sacrifice. Another group of fraudsters tries to claim a share under false pretenses, saying, “Your brother owed me money.” Fear becomes so pervasive that even relatives sever all contact, saying, “We don’t want to get involved and end up in trouble.” The college director, out of fear, fires Shoirra. Other managers slam doors in Shoirra’s face when she asks for a job. Even when an educated woman agrees to work as a secretary, the dean, who has been told her husband is a “criminal,” rudely confronts her: “What, were you trying to form a gang of killers here? Were you planning to drag me down too? (Emphasis added—O.B.) Oh, you’re mistaken; I’m a loyal servant of my people. Go, get out of here.” The words “I’m a loyal servant of my people” bring to mind the ominous 1937, echoing like cruel irony over society. During those infamous years, many innocent people were accused of treason under similar grandiose slogans.

The principle of turning an innocent person into a criminal, the normalization of slander as a practice, not only divides society but also alienates relatives from one another, stripping people of their humanity. Jealousy, petty goals, and revenge turn into powerful tools in the hands of the rich and powerful. Greed, corruption, and fraud—whether in major events like Ikromiddin’s case or minor ones like the incident involving the school radio—become the norm in every layer of society, from top to bottom, including within families. Society reaches a point where people begin to believe that honesty and integrity are mistakes and wrong. Bonu’s mother, worn down by her daughter’s misfortunes, says, “It’s not your fault, my child, it’s your late father’s! If he had taught you to go with the flow, you’d have had peace. My child, truth-seekers have no friends.” When Bonu fights against illegality, favoritism, and injustice at school, the entire community turns against her.

Not only do such events push decent people toward a life of crime, but as mentioned earlier, they also leave a poisonous mark on people’s consciousness. When Iqbol Mirzo metaphorically refers to a specific period of our history as a “dark

dream,” he undoubtedly means these social ills that strip humans of their humanity.

Yes, this is the greatest tragedy—dark days may pass, many things may be restored, but it is not easy to erase the marks left in people’s minds; sometimes, it is impossible.

Because of her honesty, integrity, and virtuous nature, Bonu becomes isolated from society like a leper and loses her job, beginning a life of migration. An educated girl, a representative of the nation’s intellectual elite, starts working as a shop assistant. Later, she does similar menial jobs and faces numerous calamities. Even here, she encounters representatives of the nation who have lost their morals, conscience, modesty, and dignity. She becomes a witness to the moral degradation of people thrown into foreign lands by fate. Yet, good people still lend her a helping hand during her hardships.

Conclusion and Recommendations. The ending of the novel is devoid of false optimism: Ikromiddin remains imprisoned under an unjust verdict issued in the name of the Republic of Uzbekistan, while Almos, who caused immense suffering, escapes punishment. The liar brother achieves success, owning a “Lacetti” car, and Bonu, raised in an Islamic spirit, is driven to the brink of despair. In short, truth is half-dead, and the devils celebrate their victory. Even in the conclusion, the author remains faithful to the dominant realistic style in the depiction of events.

In “Bonu,” the social realities of a specific period of national history are widely depicted. The novel begins with scenes of family and domestic life, Bonu’s memories, her struggles with love, and her minor and major conflicts with family members. However, against the backdrop of Bonu’s life, the novel gradually transitions to the depiction of significant social realities of the nation. Through the story of one woman’s experiences, the author artistically introduces the major historical period of the nation and its important social events.

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