

A Sociological Analysis of the Role of Intellectuals in the Fight against Tyranny in Osip Mandelstam's Works

Mahshid Hosseinian Zarnaghi¹

Elahe Karimi Riabi²

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The October Revolution of 1917 would not have happened without the efforts and ideas of Russian intellectuals. When Lenin came to power as the leader of the Soviet Union, a new phase in Russian history, culture and literature began. Lenin, who was one of the revolutionary intellectuals, systematically eliminated the intellectuals who opposed the communist ideals as soon as he came to power. After Lenin, Stalin realized that he could maintain authoritarian rule by controlling intellectuals, literature, and art. He was aware of the fact that in an autocratic regime, discussing intellectual issues, even if unrelated to politics, -would increase the spirit of criticism and protest among the people. This -could endanger the authority of the Soviet government. Using new regulations, the Soviet regime monitored and controlled art and literature. In such a situation, some intellectuals considered it their social responsibility to fight against the tyranny of the autocratic ruler on the way to freedom and liberation.

2. Aim

Russia is one of Iran's most significant neighboring countries, which has influenced Iran in various ways throughout history. When interacting with other countries, it is essential to have a -thorough understanding of their history, culture, society, and politics to establish more effective relations. Therefore, understanding the history and current events of Russia is essential for establishing effective interactions and relations with Iran. There have been limited studies in Iran on the role of literature and intellectuals in opposing tyranny and expressing the wishes of the people. Examining the views and actions of Soviet freedom-loving writers and poets can provide insight into the history, culture, literature, and politics of Russia. This research investigates

¹ Master of Russian Studies, Department of Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran mhosseinian@ut.ac.ir

² Assistant Professor of Russian Studies, Department of Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (corresponding author). ekarimi@ut.ac.ir

How to cite this article:

Mahshid Hosseinianzarnaghi; Elahe Karimi Riabi. "A Sociological Analysis of the Role of Intellectuals in the Fight against Tyranny in Osip Mandelstam's Works". *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 3, 2, 2023, 49-74. doi: 10.22077/islah.2023.6445.1285



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee Journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts & Humanities*. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

the role and social mission of Osip Mandelstam in opposition to the autocracy of the government during the leadership of Stalin based on the theories of Gramsci and Said and tries to analyze the content of his works while examining the intellectual's relationship with the government and society.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The current research is of an applied nature and employs qualitative content analysis to summarize, describe, and interpret relevant materials, information, and works of the intellectual. The interpretation and review of Mandelstam's works have utilized the approach of hidden content analysis, as well as the approach of comparative content analysis based on Gramsci's and Said's theories.

4. Discussion

In the late 1920s, Stalin implemented political changes in Soviet society primarily through repressions. It is important to note that Stalin prioritized the political aspect over the economic aspect when making changes. He put the policy of suppressing all sections of society on the agenda. During the Great Terror period, Soviet ideology permeated all spheres of social life, including private life, social institutions, science, culture, and education. Ideological spirit was present in everything from school textbooks to mass marches. Prominent features of this period included intolerance, hatred towards the 'enemies of the people', and justification of lawlessness and government arbitrariness. Joseph Stalin believed that writers were the engineers of the soul, and he paid special attention to them, aware of the sensitivity of their work. He understood the power of words and the influence of intellectuals on society. In 1932, to advance his goals of unifying public opinion, he introduced the school of socialist realism as the only allowed literary trend in the country. Decisions about the fate of a work were often dictated by the momentary demands of the leader, and the mechanism for implementing Stalin's decisions was carried out carefully. Authors who did not conform to the standards of this literary school or the government were prohibited from publishing their works in the Soviet Union. Osip Mandelstam is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most prominent representatives of Russian literature in the 20th century and the Silver Age. Initially sympathetic to the revolution, Mandelstam gradually distanced himself from it after observing the regime's autocratic behavior. As one of the most important poets of the Acmeism school, he refused to create a work on the orders of the party. Mandelstam is an example of an intellectual according to Gramsci and Said's theories since he believed that an intellectual should be concerned with the people and their issues and be the spokesman of the people in political and social difficulties. Isaiah Berlin emphasizes that he knows of no other poet, except Mandelstam, who has shown as much resistance and courage in the face of oppressive regimes. Although Mandelstam criticized the

political and social conditions of his time in several works, his main offense was writing an anti-Stalinist poem. In his case, the interrogator, , considered that poem an unprecedented criminal document. The poet was well aware of his fate, yet he could not refrain from discussing the brutality and tolerance of the political system of his country. Mandelstam clarified that the concepts presented in the poem were not solely his personal perception; rather they were a reflection of the thoughts and perceptions of a segment of intellectuals and society. These attitudes were rooted in a part of society that still felt obligated to uphold moral values and recognize the worth of humanity. The poem can be seen as a weapon that any social group could use in the fight against a tyrannical government.

5. Conclusion

Literature plays a crucial role in reflecting the state of society and its social and political developments. Poets and writers have always focused on social and political issues that affect people's lives, and there exists a close relationship between literature, society, and politics. Committed poets and writers hold a special place in society due to their dedication to justice and freedom. In early 20th century Russia, the Bolsheviks quickly gained power and created an environment for the expression of ideas. However, intellectuals who could not conform to the regime's standard literature style of socialist realism either emigrated or became unemployed and isolated over time. Osip Mandelstam was a poet who spoke about forbidden thoughts and topics during the Stalinist terror era and had a highly critical approach to Stalin's repressive policies. He believed that if the Soviet regime killed people under the pretext of poetry and literature, then it should create fear in the authorities through poetry and literature. This critical spirit and resistance to repressions is evident in his works. Mandelstam's poem criticizing Stalin was a form of resistance against the prevailing regime. He refused to remain silent in the face of Stalin's tyranny, recognizing the duty of intellectuals to speak the truth. Although Mandelstam's works diverged from public opinion and went beyond it, he aspired to enlighten future generations through his writing. Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power led to the restoration of Mandelstam's dignity and the surprising welcome of his previously banned works—just as Mandelstam had predicted. According to the theories of Gramsci and Said, the intellectuals are responsible for producing culture and ideology in society. They are concerned with the society and speak for its awakening. Mandelstam's approach and works exemplify these characteristics and ethics. According to these theories, Mandelstam played the role of a true intellectual and had a significant impact on political and social actions, as well as expressing people's demands and criticisms. Despite experiencing severe oppression, he fostered a critical and resilient spirit within society. This is evident in the ideas of intellectuals and subsequent generations during the 1960s.

References

- Berlin. Isaiah (2012). *Zehn-e Russi dar Nezam-e Shoravi (The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism)*. Translated by Reza Rezaie. Tehran: Mahi publication. [in Persian]
- Farshidnik. Farzaneh (2021). "Masooliat-e Ejtemai-e Honarmand va Karkard-e Enteghadi-e Honar dar movajehe ba Bohranha-ye Tabie" ("The Social Responsibility of the Artist and the Critical Function of Art in Facing Natural Crises"). *Sociology of Art and Literature*, Volume 13 (2), 79-105. [in Persian] <https://doi.org/10.22059/jsal.2021.333177.666094>
- Hochschild. Adam (2019). *Rooh-e Naaram (The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin)*. Translated by Sudabah Qaysari. Tehran: Parse. [in Persian]
- Kia. Asghar (2002). *Taghirat-e ejtemaie (Social Changes)*. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. [in Persian]
- Mandelstam. Nadezhda (2017). *Omid Alayhe Omid: Roshanfekran-e Russi dar Doran-e Vahshat-e Stalini (Hope against hope: Russian intellectuals during the Staliništ terror)*. Translated by Bijan Ashtari. Tehran: Sales. [in Persian]
- Mathews. John R. (2018). *Zohor Va Soghoot-e Etehad-e Jamahir-e Shoravi (The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union)*. Translated by Farid Javaherkalam. Tehran: Ghoghnoos. [in Persian]
- Rolle. J. (2016). *Adabiat va Enghelab (Nevisandegan-e Russ) Literature and Revolution (Russian authors)*. Translated by Ali Asghar Haddad, Tehran: Niloofar. [in Persian]
- Shentalinsky. V. (2020). *Baygani-e Adabi_e Police Makhfi (Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime)*. Tehran: Sales. [in Persian]
- Voinovich. V. (2020). *Shoravi Zed-e Shoravi (Soviet Anti-Soviet)*. translated by Bijan Ashtari. Tehran: Sales. [in Persian]