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### **The Problem of Individualism in the Works by Vazha-Pshavela**

**Abstract:** *The article deals with the problem of relationship between the individual and the society; the attitude of the author towards the ethic concept of individualism.*

**Keywords:** *Vazha-Pshavela, the problem of relationship between the individual and the society, individualism.*

The relation between the individual and the society is a central issue in the works by Vazha-Pshavela; therefore, the theme of individualism is a noteworthy notion playing an important role in the artistic creations of the writer.

Vazha-Pshavela's great interest in outstanding personalities made Kita Abashidze come to the conclusion that Vazha-Pshavela's worldview was individualistic: "*Vazha as a symbolist is individualist, and goes almost to the extreme. For him the identity is of great importance*" [Vazha-Pshavela... 1955: 174]. The same idea is outlined by S. Khundadze who stated that "*Vazha-Pshavela is individualist, and strives for venerating the individual*" [Vazha-Pshavela... 1955: 377].

Therefore, Vazha-Pshavela's heroes and their individualistic nature became an issue for a thorough discussion, in which many outstanding scholars were involved. Moreover, even nowadays it remains debatable among the scholars of Vazha-Pshavela.

Sergi Danelia, a philosopher and literary critic of the XX century, in his essay published in the *Chrestomathy (Vazha-Pshavela in Georgian literary criticism)* argues that the characters of Aluda, Jokola, Mindia act according to their individualistic motives and "*The poems by Vazha-Pshavela, namely Aluda Ketelauro, Stumar-Maspindzeli and Gvelismchameli strive to show an individual which is doomed for solitude and alienation from the society*" [Danelia, 2008: 76]. Sergi Danelia outlined, that even though Vazha-Pshavela was sympathetic towards his characters, he was a complete opponent of individualism that is why all these characters fail: "*Vazha was compassionate towards Aluda Ketelauro, Jokola and Mindia, but compassion does not mean that Vazha supported them and their ideas... None of the individuals in Vazha's poems win. Aluda Ketelauro, Jokola and Aghaza, as well as Mindia represent the failure of individualism. Thus the conclusion is clear: Vazha does not believe in the victory of individualism*" [Danelia, 2008: 84-85]. Hence, in Sergi Danelia's view the poet favored collectivism; As Sergi Danelia suggests "*a person is a mere bubble on the bottomless ocean surface: the ocean boils, a bubble pops on its surface, stays a little while and then... without a trace, goes down to the bottom of the ocean*" [Danelia, 2008: 89].

Another critic interested in the relationship between the individual and society in the creative works by Vazha-Pshavela, was Professor Grigol Kiknadze, who argued that taking into account the social background is a rather important factor; Professor Kiknadze wrote: "*taking the side of the individual in their battle against the society, does not always mean an apologia of individualism... Vazha-Pshavela's characters cannot be regarded as having individualist characters. They in their essence are social phenomena who desire better social conditions... Vazha-Pshavela was interested in the merger-absorption problem of the individual and the society; socium, which would praise individuality was acceptable for Vazha-Pshavela*" [Kiknadze, 2005: 136-137].

Recently there have been several attempts to explain aspirations of Vazha-Pshavela's characters by their individualistic nature. For example, Levan Berdzenishvili in his work *Human Rights in Georgian literature* argues that "*Vazha-Pshavela places the individual*

*rights above the rights of the society*” [Berdzenishvili, 2004: 72-77]; the same idea is shown in *Vazha-Pshavela and the Basis of Verse* by Zaza Shatirishvili, who states that “*Vazha-Pshavela’s characters distance themselves from the socium and fight for their own rights and dignity*” [Shatirishvili, 2006: 28 -30].

However, while discussing Vazha-Pshavela’s heroes and their individualism, usually less attention is paid to explaining the term itself, particularly from the point of view of ethics.

Before defining Individualism, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of the individual and the person. According to N. Berdyaev, “*an individual is a naturalist-biological category, and the person - religious and spiritual ... the individual is part of the a type, is derived from a category, but it is able to isolate and confront them... The individual is born and dies. A person is not born, he is formed from God. Personality is the idea of God and God’s thought... The person is an assignment for the individual. Sometimes a biologically and psychologically explicit individual may not have a personality. Person is an integrity and unity, which has a certain value and is eternal*” [Berdyaev, 2010: 92].

Person, first of all, is an "ethical entity" (Grigol Kiknadze), while the individual is - bio-sociological. A person is someone, who has an ethical ideal and feels his responsibility towards it. The individual living predominantly in nature it is the product of a biological process and a public organization. “*Struggle of the individual for existence and for supremacy in the family is not in any case related to a person’s values. Fighting for the raise of the person is a spiritual battle, not a biological one*” [Berdyaev, 2010: 97].

As for individualism, as scholarly literature suggests “*individualism is the belief that an individual is higher than any social group or collective... ethical individualism means such arrangement of the society, which is better for the individuals, and the individual rights, needs and interests should be taken into account.*” [Heywood, 2004: 33]

If we look at Vazha-Pshavela’s works from this perspective, it becomes obvious that individual rights are never placed above the rights of the society, or a view, according to which, preferably the individual behavior is seen as a measure of morality.

In the poem *Aluda Ketelaury* the alienation of the main character from the society does not occur due to an individual initiative, but as a result of coercion from the community. Despite the severe punishment of the Khevsurian people, for Aluda revenge is an unfamiliar feeling. As a moral hero, he remains faithful to the pathos of his people and categorically prohibits the wife and mother to curse the community. Ketelaurs’s heart and soul remains with his native region:

“Aluda once more  
wanted to look back at his home:  
“Goodbye my fields!  
You were my pleasures in life!  
Goodbye my home!  
My heart beats even faster  
Goodbye my native land!  
Giver of bravery and force!”<sup>1</sup>

It should also be noted, that referring to Aluda Ketelaury as a "heretic" [Tetruashvili, 1982: 22] or "dissident", which some scholars do, is not correct, as in the poem Aluda does not start a new religious movement nor is he trying to impose his opinions on the community. Sacrifices a sheep for Mutsali’s soul is a single act. Aluda has such a great inner conviction in the "salvation" of Mutsali’s soul that he cannot control himself and casually takes over the functions of the foreman. However, this does not imply that he intends to assume this function, or establish a new religious movement to give sacrifice for the unbaptized. There are no references in the poem about it. Aluda himself is perfectly aware of the peculiarity of

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<sup>1</sup> The non-poetical translation is done by the translator of the article.

he own behavior, so he pleads the "Lord": "Do not put my sin on my children" – in other words he does not want his behavior to be deemed as a sin.

Free from individualistic motives are the heroes' actions in another poem by Vazha-Pshavela *Stumar-Maspindzeli*. Jokhola does not oppose the community, in order to establish a new law, but because he was not allowed to complete his holy duty of guest-host relationship, which is recognized by the public as an obligatory moral norm. By his actions Jokhola does not only defend his personal and family dignity but of those who violate their own rules because they are full of vengeance.

Some critics argue that Jokhola finally got expelled from the community. According to Sergi Danelia Jokhola and Aluda “*firstly on a subjective level, i.e. by moral consciousness separated from the community, e.g. renounce themselves from the collective principle, and it resulted into an objective separation: Aluda and Jokhola battle with the community and fall apart with it*” [Danelia, 2008: 78]. Z. Shatirishvili believes that Jokhola does not aim at defending the community of the Khevsurian people but only fights for his own family's dignity and well-being... Jokhola decides that “he alone should fight”. He should fight alone, because his guest and his brother are not buried and therefore his dignity is assaulted. He must fight the enemy, not to protect the community as a whole, but egoistically only worries about his home, family, family principles, dignity” [Shatirishvili 2006: 29].

The text of the poem proves exactly the opposite. Despite the wicked actions of the Kists, Jokhola remains committed to the community and fights against the Khevsurs. His “lone fight” is motivated by the fact that he only cares about the well-being and dignity of his own family, and restore his person's reputation, because the Kists do not respect him anymore and do not let him fight along with them in the army:

“- No more?! What do you say, stupid one?  
Alone will I fight,  
the whole army will see;  
who is faithful, and who not,  
afterwards will be seen.”

The community still incorrectly perceives his behavior and ultimately dooms Jokhola – and in the end do not even want to bury him in the cemetery.

Georgian Literary Studies specifically speaks about the problem of individuals in the poem *Gvelismchameli*<sup>2</sup>. According to K. Kapaneli, “*Gvelismchameli is a philosophical poem about suffering, knowledge, love, tragedy, and the tyranny of the family; The protagonist of this poem - corporal - noble and revolutionary anarchist, is fighting for the highest culture of the human spirit, individual liberation and love for sub specie aeternitatis*” [Kapaneli, 1926: 238].

As Sergi Danelia outlined, “*Vazha-Pshavela raises the question: Where is the end of individualism? The end of individualism, in Vazha-Pshavela's opinion is when the individual derives from humanity. The first face of the human personality in history Aluda Ketelauri alienates from the community: he stands aside from the community. The last face of individualism, Mindia alienates from his own humanity; thus he stands aside from mankind*” [Danelia, 2008: 79].

According to V. Kotetishvili, “*Mindia started his great way. He, like the overman, subdued everything, was as poor as the creator. But was, rather when he stood on the individual peak, where people are not sitting in their nests, but joins the world, as a part of large life*” [Kotetishvili, 1959: 609].

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<sup>2</sup> Vazha-Pshavela's idea about the individualist-philosophical theories (especially F. Nietzsche's ethic concepts) is rather interestingly discussed in Iuza Evgenidze's work *Vazha – Pshavela* [Evgenidze 1989:385-403]

While reading the text of the poem we are assured that Mindia's actions are not individualistic and the notion of "individualism" is out of place here. It could be argued that in fact the individualistic view in the poem belongs to Mzia and Chalkhia, because in their opinion, the need for personal behavior is a measure of rightness. The nature exists as long as it meets the human needs. "The person, who only gets pleasure from this life" - these are the words Mindia uses to describe his wife, as well as clearly express the attitude of Mzia towards the world, which radically opposes Mindia's worldview. In this poem the egocentric consciousness and the universal consciousness of Mindia confront, who perceives the outside world not only as a method, but as a goal. According to such an attitude people are committed to find their place in the cosmic order, to recognize the value of other objects, and to perceive themselves as an organic part of the world.

The main concern for Mindia is his loss of intuitive ability, and that he is no longer able to be beneficial for others "how can I aid other people, when I no more hold the knowledge". It is obvious Mindia has dedicated his life to helping his community and suffers from the fact that he no longer can support them:

"I cannot support my country,  
Because I have no ideas anymore"

Such beliefs are, of course, individualistic and it is clear that here the character discusses his purpose on a social dimension and not an individualist one.

As mentioned above, recently, there are attempts to attribute Vazha-Pshavela's ethical beliefs within the framework of liberal outlook highlighting the fact that the poet put individual rights ahead of a person's rights: "*Vazha-Pshavela in front of the readers rigorously puts two truths, and the author sympathies are to the side of the truth, that puts the human rights higher than community rights*" [Berdzenishvili, 2004: 77].

The absolution of the individual rights is really an achievement of liberal ideology, but one should note that the transformation of an individual into a person does not necessary stand in liberalism. Individual being, not to infringe the rights of others, has been considered to be a self-sufficient condition. The predominant characteristic of the liberal approach is the Atomist approach, i.e. such a view perceives the society as a collection of individuals, a sum of units.

Vazha-Pshavela's attitude is rather a different case. His ethical beliefs are based on the personality of the individual, not the concept. For Vazha-Pshavela the first moral attitude is that the person should perceive himself as an individual. The society in the author's view is a much deeper phenomenon than a mere collection of individuals. Nation, according to Vazha-Pshavela is a human spiritual unity, collective person, whose parent is Mother Nature herself and is related to her. Vazha-Pshavela's activity coincided with the period of time when the liberal-capitalist individualism in fact slowly blossomed, and the narrow utilitarianism threatened the national integrity. During this period Vazha-Pshavela wrote a very interesting story, "What the Earth said", in which the Earth says to the human being: "*O man! Do not say that you have caught this land by your sword... You have no right to say, this is mine and mine alone. This can be said by a nation, and the nation alone, because the nation is my son and I - its mother*" [Vazha-Pshavela 1979: 108].

Individual satisfaction and fulfillment of the aspirations of the heroes will never be exhausted in Vazha-Pshavela's works. In Vazha-Pshavela's works not only people strive to maintain others needs and wishes, but also the nature aims at it. The mountain stream feels relieved when people and animals drink it and do not feel thirsty anymore; the small stream feeds the nature and dry wood and grass. Its biggest trouble is if it does not manage to be beneficial for others: "*Last night I saw what a bad dream! I saw, as if I was dying. Drought, a drought occurred, grass, trees, my parents, they were all dried out, I was almost dried out as well. A nice little birdy, arrived from the branches and wanted to swim in my water, but could*

*not dip the shoulders and began to cry. I saw it and I felt very bad - "Where did my grace go" – I whispered to myself*" [Vazha-Pshavela 1964a: 78].

That's the nature of each living creature that they are connected with the members of their family and they perceive their happiness as their own. Standing on a high mountain, the poplar is complaining about not having his fellows by his side, and that his life is a barren life: *"What is my life after all, standing on this high mountain alone? If I cannot hear anything or let anybody else here me, make them rejoice inside and be joyful myself, is not this life of the dead?!"* [Vazha-Pshavela, 1964b: 40].

Vazha-Pshavela's heroes are not necessarily prone to differ from others, separated from society and be in their own, individual space. If they behave differently from the general public in some cases, it is not based on a deliberate goal - to distinguish from others, - but also the tension, motivated by high moral goals. Their different behavior is the result they achieve and not their goal. The writer did not even consider the individual and society from the very beginning as opposing parties, whose interests are constantly in conflict with, but as an organic whole, where one cannot exist without the other.

Vazha-Pshavela sees ethically neutral individualism beyond good and evil; moreover, individualism as a phenomenon has no moral value. The writer is attracted by the immensely powerful person trying to serve the good. Vazha-Pshavela was perfectly aware of the danger of degeneration from social responsibility to individual selfishness.

Vazha-Pshavela thought that striving for someone's happiness is the primary moral objective: *"If everybody will try to help one another and will be in another person's assistance, others will be in our assistance and will want good for us - it's the same as helping himself out, but by other colors, other rules, which are divine, more human, because this attitude destroys envy, hostility among men"* [Vazha-Pshavela, 1964c: 190].

It must be stressed that according to Vazha-Pshavela altruism is not utilitarian, but has a clear moral content, i.e. in Vazha-Pshavela's works the moral hero fights, above all, for the moral improvement of the society, and only after that for the social (in the strictest sense of this concept) purposes and empirical happiness. Striving for the spiritual perfection of the society, first, of all, means personal improvement, which should prepare the foundation for the transformation of the society. Vazha-Pshavela's characters always care for the well-being of the community and if in some cases they have to confront the social environment, it is because the society does not understand the moral aspirations of the individuals. Aluda, Jokhola, Mindia or Kichiri care for the moral improvement of their comrades, call upon them to live according to high moral principles and try to be such an example of existence.

According to Vazha-Pshavela, the person can sacrifice everything for the public (including life), except their own personality, or moral beliefs, because a viable society is originally based on human and where there is no opportunity for personal expression, there a real society cannot exist. No social purpose is worth violating spiritual integrity of an individual. Being a person in Vazha-Pshavela's creative writing, is the human's foremost mission, moral aim. Maintaining individuality means commitment to the moral values, which consciously or intuitively is recognized by the man. Vazha-Pshavela heroes prefer to die as persons, rather than to maintain a biological existence without any dignity and faith.

In conclusion, Vazha-Pshavela's understanding of a personality is much more superior than suggested by the liberal education of the individual and his/her rights. Vazha-Pshavela's personality is based on the Christian understanding, according to which "person – humans should not be reduced to the level of nature" [Losski, 2007: 409]. Indeed, Vazha-Pshavela's characters seek to achieve standing "always above themselves" (Gregory of Nyssa), and therefore, rise above nature – thus, for sustaining moral beliefs they can even sacrifice their own lives.

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