



# A Content-based Analysis of Shahriar's Azerbaijani Turkish Poem *Getmə Tərsa Balası* (A Christian Child) in Terms of Religious Images and Interpretations

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## Abstract

The present study aims to analyze Shahriar's *Getmə Tərsa Balası* (do not leave me the Christian Child) poem in terms of religious images using content-based analysis. Initially, the poem published in Azerbaijani Turkish has been analyzed by the researchers to find out the main religious themes covering Islam and Christianity. Then, a number of images created by the poet, including Hell and Heaven, mosque versus church and Mount Sinai, have been extracted and discussed in detail by using the English translation of the verses. Finally, the results have been presented using the extracted themes. The findings showed that Shahriar started his poem from a worldly image in order to reach divine images.

**Keywords:** Shahriar, *Getmə Tərsa Balası* (A Christian Child), Content-based analysis, Azerbaijani Turkish

## 1. Introduction

Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Behjat-Tabrizi, known by his pen name Shahriar, was an Iranian Azerbaijani poet, who published his poems in Azerbaijani Turkish and Persian. He was born in Khoshgenab located in Tabriz in 1906, but he continued his education in Tehran and fell in love when studying medical sciences. The unsuccessful love story and a number of other incidents changed his entire life and caused him to create beautiful poems both in Persian as well as Azerbaijani Turkish. He had a mandatory migration to the northeastern Iranian city of Neyshabour nearly six months before completing his education in medical sciences. Then, he went to the holy city of Mashhad where Imam Reza (A), the eighth Shia Imam is buried, and could not complete his medical studies due to the vicissitudes he encountered after his love story. He returned to Tehran in 1935 and started working as a clerk in Keshavarzi bank of Iran. After a while, he went to Tabriz and worked in the same organization. He was then awarded an honorary doctorate in Persian Literature by the University of Tabriz. It is said that Shahriar was under the influence of Imam Ali (A), the first Shia Imam. Moreover, the Azerbaijani poet was affected by a number of Iranian literary figures such as Hafiz. He died due to his illness in Mehr Hospital in Tehran.

Regarding scientific works on Shahriar's poems, many scholars have conducted research studies especially on his most famous Azerbaijani poem Heydar Babaya Salam published in 1954. According to online sources such as Wikipedia (2015a), this work was translated into over 90 languages. However, other works written by him have been ignored or very little has been done on them. So, this study aims at investigating one of his great Azerbaijani poems called *Getmə Tərsa Balası* (Do not leave me the Christian Child). In other words, this study aims to find out paramount religious themes and images used by Shahriar in this poem. As the name of the poem suggests i.e., *Getmə Tərsa Balası*, in this piece of art different vocabularies related to Christianity and Islam can be seen since Shahriar was a Muslim per se and this poem is about a Christian Child.

According to the previous lines, in the present study main images used by Shahriar in writing the poem will be investigated using content-based analysis. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

- What are the main religious themes and images used in Shahriar's *Getmə Tərsa Balası*?

## 2. Literature Review

A review of the literature shows that Shahriar's poems have been studied by many scholars including *Jafari (2013)*, *Şixiyeva (2011)*, *Şahbazi (2011)*, *Quliyev (2011)*, *Rəhimli (2011)*, *Muradov (2011)* and *Həsənova (2011)* among others. For instance, Jafari (2013) investigated Shahriar's position in Persian contemporary poetry by depicting some of his Persian poems.

In a similar vein, *Şixiyeva (2011)* analyzed mystic concepts in a number of Shahriar's poems, concluding that the use of mystic images in the poems caused Shahriar to create renowned philosophical as well as dreamlike pieces of art. Moreover, *Şahbazi (2011)* conducted a similar study investigating Shahriar's Heydar Babaya Salam and called the work *Mənim də bir adım gəlsin dilizə* (remember me as well). In his study, he discussed the nostalgic images in Heydar Babaya Salam and believed that the mentioned nostalgic feelings have delved deeply into Shahriar's heart.

Quliyev (2011) discussed Heydar Babaya Salam and pointed out that this poem showed Azerbaijan history and depicted Azerbaijanis' life style, humanity and ideology. In another study, *Rəhimli (2011)* demonstrated that there are tinges of freedom and the inner self in Shahriar's poems. The author believes that Shahriar is totally against cruelty and oppression.

In some other studies, Nowruzzi (2010), *Həriri Əkbəri (2010)* and *Zəfərzadə (2010)* focused on Azerbaijani culture used in poems, indicating that Azerbaijani culture cannot be detached from poems written by poets having Turkish backgrounds.

Surveying the related literature, the researchers of the present study will analyze Shahriar's *Getmə Tərsa Balası* poem in terms of images found in it in an attempt to bridge the gap in the literature.

## 3. Method

The current study which is a qualitative study aims to analyze *Getmə Tərsa Balası* poem of Shahriar in terms of religious themes and images. Content-based analysis is used in order to answer the research question of the study.

### 3.1. Corpus

The corpus of the current study is *Getmə Tərsa Balası* poem of Shahriar which consists of 13 lines.

### 3.2. Procedure

To answer the posed research question, *Getmə Tərsa Balası* poem of Shahriar was studied meticulously by researchers of the study whom two of them are trilingual linguists knowing Azerbaijani Turkish, Persian and English. Firstly, main religious themes used in the poem were found using content analysis. Secondly, religious images created by Shahriar were tallied after scanning the English translation of the poem. It should be mentioned that content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). Some verses of the poem translated into English appear below:

### *Getmə Tərsa Balası*

*İzn ver toy gecəsi mən də sənə dayə gəlim,  
Əl qatanda sənə məşşatə təməşayə gəlim.*

*Sən bu məhtab gecəsi seyrə çıxan bir sərv ol,  
İzn ver, mən də dalınca sürünüb sayə gəlim.*

*Mənə də baxdın o şahlə gözlə, mən qaragün  
Cürətim olmadı bir kəlmə təmənnayə gəlim.*

*Mən cəhənəmdə də baş yastığa qoysam sənlə,  
Heç ayılmam ki, durub cənnəti-məvayə gəlim.*

*Nənə qarnında sənlə əkiz olsaydım mən,  
İstəməzdim doğulub birdə bu dünyayə gəlim.*

*Sən yatıb cənnəti rüyadə görəndə gecələr  
Mən də cənnətdə quş ollam ki, o rüyayə gəlim.*

*Qıtlıq illər yağıştək quruyub göz yaşımız,  
Kuyə-eşqində gərək birdə müsəllayə gəlim.*

*Sən də səhrayə marallar kimi bir çıx, nə olur ki.  
Mən də bir seyrə çıxanlar kimi səhrayə gəlim.*

*Allahından sən əgər qorxmayıb olsan tərsa,*

*Qorxaram mən də dönüb dini Məsihayə gəlīm.*

*Şeyx Sənan kimi donquz otarıb illərcə  
Səni bir görmək üçün məbəde-tərsayə gəlīm.*

*Yox sənəm! Anlamadım, anlamadım, haşa mən,  
Buraxım məscidimi, sənə kelisayə gəlīm?!*

*Gəl çıxmaq Turə-təcallayə, sən ol celveyə-Tur,  
Mən də Musa kimi, o Turə təcallayə gəlīm.*

*Şirdir Şəhriyar-ın şeri, əlində şəmşir,  
Kim deyir mən belə sir ilə dəvayə gəlīm?*

Oh, let me be your mother at your wedding night,  
And watch you while you are being made up by wedding hairstylist.

You, be the cypress that has gone out in the moonlight,  
Let me follow you like your shadow.

You looked at me with your fascinating eyes and poor I,  
Could not even say a word to you.

My tears are dried like the rain in lands affected by drought,  
I should get to your prayer land.

What if you be a gazelle and go to the desert,  
I will be like a hunter and come to the same desert.  
Shahriar's poem is like a lion in his hand,  
Who dares to fight with this lion?

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The content analysis of the poem showed that Shahriar used a number of religious themes mentioned in holy books such as Mount Sinai, which can be described as:

Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb, is a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt that is a possible location of the biblical Mount Sinai. The latter is mentioned many times in the Book of Exodus and other books of the Bible, and the Quran (Wikipedia, 2015a, p.1)

The images he used range from Hell, Heaven and mosque to church. In other words, he used religious terminologies important for Christians and Muslims simultaneously in an attempt to develop his poem. For instance, he used the word Hell two times and the word Heaven four times showing that religion is an integrated part of his inner belief.

Having reviewed the related literature and the English translation of the poem, the authors tried to interpret the poem while considering the images and themes. As shown below, Shahriar used the images in order to decorate his poetry.

If I put my head on a pillow with you in the Hell,  
I would not wake up to enter the Heaven.

Regarding the meaning of Heaven and Hell, one can say that Heaven is a place where angels, saints and other heavenly beings live while Hell is a dark and dismal place linked to punishment and torture. Also, the most common forms of the words in Azerbaijani for Hell are *jahannam* and *dusakh* meanwhile *jannat* or *behesht* for Heaven. In this verse, it can be seen that the poet prefers to be with his beloved in Hell and eternal torment rather than entering Heaven.

If we were twins in Mother's womb,  
I would not want to be born and open my eyes to this world.

Mother's womb is a holy place for Muslims including Azerbaijanis. It is the origin of life and a place that prepares a human to start his/her life. In this verse, it can be seen that the poet depicts Mother's womb and recites that he prefers to

stay in the womb and does not like to enter this world if he remains with his beloved there.

While you are dreaming of Heaven at night,  
I will be the bird-of-Heaven to enter your dream.

The poet uses Heaven again in this verse. He will fly as a bird-of-Heaven to enter his beloved dream if she sees Heaven in her dreams. He sees everything like Heaven.

In case you do not fear of Allah and become a *Tər̄sa*,  
I fear to convert to Christianity.

Fear of Allah is an invaluable issue among Muslims and Shahriar says to her beloved that in case she does not fear of Allah and becomes a *Tər̄sa* – which is among deadly sins- he may convert to Christianity.

I will keep pigs like Sheikhe Sanan for a long time,  
To see you, I will come to *Tər̄sa* temple.

The poet refers to Sheikhe Sanan in this verse who was according to Wikipedia (2015b, p. 1) the main character of "a verse play, tragedy in five acts, written by an Azerbaijani poet and playwright Huseyn Javid about love of a Muslim sheikh - Sanan to a Georgian-Christian girl *Khumar*." Additionally, keeping pigs for Muslims at home is not *Halal*, any object or an action which is permissible to use or engage in, according to Islamic law. It is also *Najis*, are things or persons regarded as ritually unclean according to Islamic law. So, keeping pig is a much forbidden job that the poet recites to handle it to be a pretext to see his beloved. It is a kind of preparation to convert to his beloved's religion.

Oh no my dear, I made a mistake, I will not,  
Lose my mosque and accompany you to Church.

The poet repents of his previous conversion to his beloved's religion. He proclaims that he will not lose his mosque and accompany her to Church where Christians pray.

Let's climb Mount Sinai, You be the sign of it,  
And I will approach Mount Sinai like Moses.

In this verse that is the climax of this Ghazal, we can see the poet's beautiful termination of his work. Mount Sinai occupies religious significance among Abrahamic religions. In this verse, the poet moves from one religion and talks about Mount Sinai that is accepted as well as respected by both Muslims and Christians and also other Abrahamic religions. He uses a simile and describes his beloved as the sign of Mount Sinai and himself as Moses. He ends his poem by climbing Mount Sinai with him to be like Moses in order to reach Allah, the Almighty God.

The findings of the present study about religious images in Shahriar's poetry are in line with a number of studies such as Almaz (2006) who found that Shahriar used religious images in his poems especially Heydar Babaya Salam. Moreover, Shahmoradi (2010) found mystic images in Shahriar's poetry and pointed out that he used Qur'anic images to make a Paradise in his poems. In an overview related to Shahriar's thoughts, Jafari (2013, p. 317) stated that "His social Love in the voice of God is evident in every verse of..." poems written by Shahriar. Similarly, Jafari (2013, p. 318) continued to note that "Love starts in his poems from human love and goes to divine love. He knows sympathy and love to the people of world as the highest love and appreciates it. His lyrical content is inspired by thoughts of him in the context of social, romantic, political, praise, satire, elegy, asceticism, mysticism, religion makes him write poems". Describing Shahriar's visual images as innovative, Jafari (2013) said that images and metaphors are integral parts in his poems. Kaviani Pour (1998) and Mushref (2014) also discussed Shahriar's use of mystic images in his poems.

## 5. Conclusion

If we look at this Ghazal as a whole, it can be seen that the poet starts from worldly description (watching the hairstylist) of his beloved. Then he continues his perspective toward his beloved with some divine images that are romantic and show worldly feelings. He ends his poem with a pure divine image (Mount Sinai) that can attach him to his Allah.

All in all, it can be noticed that Shahriar, in his poem named *Getmə Tər̄sa Balası*, starts his poem with some worldly images and ends it with a complete divine image.

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