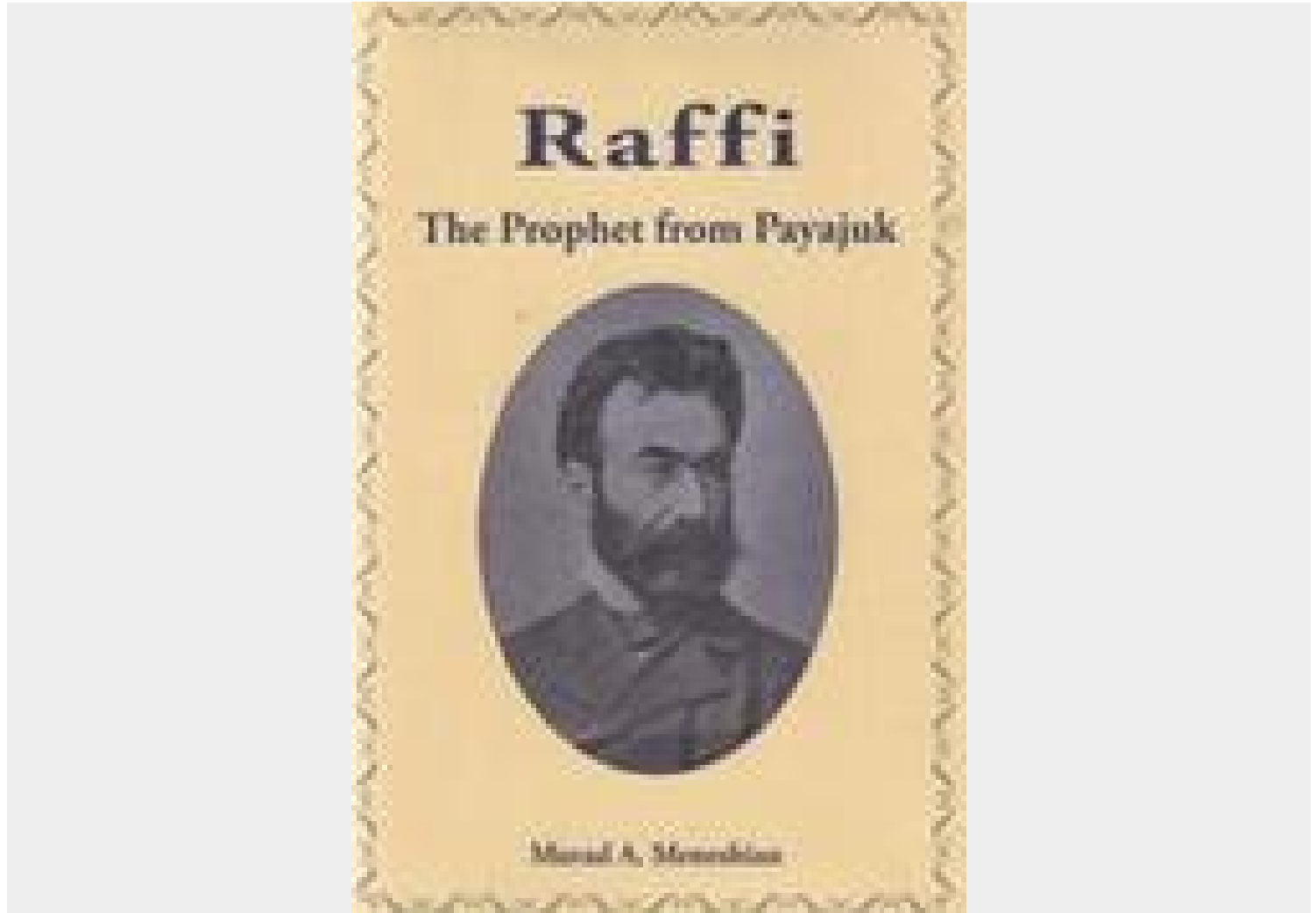


LITERARY/POLITICAL SOUL OF 19TH CENTURY ARMEN. RENAISSANCE

Posted on June 26, 2012 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



Raffi, The Prophet From Payajuk By Murad A. Meneshian

Reviewed by **Vahe H. Apelian PhD**, 26 June 2012

The meticulously and painstakingly researched "Raffi, the Prophet from Payajuk" by Murad A. Meneshian is published by Mayreni Publishing, Monterrey, CA.

The bulk of the 360-page book (twenty-one chapters) feature the evolution of Raffi, the most prominent and prolific of Armenian novelists. The epic biography is followed by "Raffi Remembered"--forty pages of appraisal of the novelist and his legacy by 40 individuals. It's followed by 15 pages of numerical annotations--483 of them! The seven-page index lists persons, places, newspaper and periodicals connected to the great novelist.

Raffi, The Prophet From Payajuk By Murad A. Meneshian

Reviewed by **Vahe H. Apelian PhD**, 26 June 2012

The meticulously and painstakingly researched "Raffi, the Prophet from Payajuk" by Murad A. Meneshian is published by Mayreni Publishing, Monterrey, CA.

The bulk of the 360-page book (twenty-one chapters) feature the evolution of Raffi, the most prominent and prolific of Armenian novelists. The epic biography is followed by "Raffi Remembered"--forty pages of appraisal of the novelist and his legacy by 40 individuals. It's followed by 15 pages of numerical annotations--483 of them! The seven-page index lists persons, places, newspaper and periodicals connected to the great novelist.

The appendix lists Raffi's books and their first publication dates, including the foreign translations. The author lists 21 book titles written by Raffi. Some of Raffi's novels have been translated into Russian (7), Georgian (6), German (2), French (3), Polish (1), English (6) and Spanish (1).

The five-page bibliography lists eighty authors, at times with more than one source referenced from the same author, along with a reference to *Hairenik* and to a centennial commemorative committee. The author spent a year in Armenia in quest of sources for his exhaustive work. Raffi (Hagop Melik Hagopian) was born in Payajuk, Persia in 1835. Universally loved by Armenians, the novelist passed away in Tblisi, Georgia on April 25, 1888.

I vaguely remember the lyrics of a popular '60s song which asked whether the situation made the man or the man made the situations. Raffi was the product of his times and his times were partly the product of his popular pen. It would be impossible to understand Raffi without thoroughly understanding the period he lived--a challenging endeavor that the author has accomplished and conveyed superbly.

I cannot fathom how Mr. Meneshian accomplished his immense task in a mere year spent in

Armenia. In the introduction he does not specify when he embarked on his scholarship of Raffi. It is obvious, however, that Raffi had been a pre-teen fascination. Like the author, I, too, was a Raffi fan in my adolescence. However, I read no other Raffi novels afterwards. The novels are fascinating for a teenager but no more. It takes maturity to understand the depth and the reasons for his novels. In order to do that the teen needs to carry his fascination well into his youth and beyond. It is obvious that the author has done that. I quote Murad: "*In early 1970s I had the opportunity to order several of Raffi's novels from Vienna Mkhitarist. I read the novels once again, and again I was fascinated by them*".

Mr. Meneshian was fascinated by the novels of Raffi as a teen and as an adult. However, as an adult he must have felt the need to understand the era Raffi lived in to better understand the man who stirred his enduring fascination. The author must have then engaged in collateral scholarship as well, for lack of a better description, in order to understand the social forces which were shaping Raffi's times and often pinned one camp against the other. Raffi, an architect of the 19th century Eastern Armenian literary and political awakening, questioned the status quo and was not immune to these forces. The loyalty of his staunch followers, the indifference, if not outright animosity, of his opponents attest to that. This monumental work is nothing less than decades' long labor whose finishing touches were made over a year--fittingly and out of necessity in Armenia.

Murad A. Menseshian is a retired Bell Laboratories research chemist. In his dedication, he says his father "*followed the path set by Raffi.*" He co-dedicates the book to his mother--Anush nee Gezurian "*who dared to survive the Genocide.*"

The book makes for a very pleasant reading. Raffi wrote in pre-Soviet Eastern Armenian and popularized the region. We have long given up discussing whether knowing how to read and write in Armenian are imperative to keep our national heritage. We have tacitly, if not overtly, accepted the inevitable and sad reality that fewer of us in the Diaspora read and write in Armenian and fewer will do so as time goes by. However, we cannot claim to uphold our national heritage while continuing to live in Diaspora--and not read in Armenian--if we do not read Armenian books in English or in French. This book is a must especially for all those who do not read Armenian but would like to maintain the umbilical cord with our colorful but often sad "modern" history. If we fail to do that we have no one to blame but ourselves to have been beaten on two fronts twice over, but this time of our choosing.

"*The rain falling on the open casket had not altered Raffi's gentle face*" writes Murad in his concluding paragraph. "*He seemed to be asleep. He appeared as if his thoughts glowed on his finely furrowed wide forehead. At the end of the interment services when the priest uttered his bidding prayers, the crowd spontaneously cried out "He lives! He Lives!"* Indeed he does. There are few Armenian first names where we make a mental connection with the most prominent person bearing that name. Among the latter prominently stands out the name Raffi coined by no other than Raffi himself.

Murad A. Meneshian may be reached at 1612 Executive Lane Glenview IL. 60026. His email is

Govdoon@yahoo.com. The book retails for \$35, including shipping and handling.

