



## The Birth of the “Woman Question” in Azerbaijan in the 19th Century

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### Abstract

The article examines the emergence of the “woman question” in Azerbaijan during the 19th century. After establishing the research concept and analysing the relevant literature, the topic is discussed in two sections. The first section examines the daily traditional lives of Caucasian Turkic women, while the second section analyses the changes and transformations of Turkic women during the Tsarist period. A retrospective analysis of the literature on the subject revealed that the problem emerged simultaneously with social and cultural needs. Azerbaijani intellectuals, who espoused the principle of creating an intellectually developed nation, posited that this goal could be achieved through educated women. Aware of the difficulties in educating and developing women who were confined to the home in the traditional patriarchal society, these intellectuals both acknowledged the existence of the women's problem and initiated efforts to establish special schools for girls with the aim of addressing it. As a consequence of these endeavours, a new generation of conscious and educated women emerged in the new century.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, National Bourgeoisie, Women, Polygamy.

## 19. Yüzyılda Azerbaycan'da “Kadın Sorunu”nun Doğuşu

### Öz

19. yüzyıl boyunca Azerbaycan'da kadın sorununun ortaya çıkışı, bu makalenin başlıca araştırma konusunu oluşturur. Genel araştırma konseptinin belirlenmesi ve literatürün tahlil edilmesinden sonra sorun iki başlık halinde ele alınmıştır. İlk başlıkta Kafkasyalı Türk kadının gündelik geleneksel yaşamı ele alınırken, ikinci başlıkta Çarlık döneminde Türk kadınının geçirdiği değişim ve dönüşüm irdelenmiştir. Konuyla ilgili literatürün retrospektif yöntemle irdelenmesi sonucunda sorunun sosyal ve kültürel ihtiyaçlara eş zamanlı olarak ortaya çıktığı belirlenmiştir. Düşünsel düzeyde gelişmiş millet yaratılması ilkesini benimseyen Azerbaycan aydınları, konulan hedefe eğitilmiş kadınlarla ulaşılabilceğini tahayyül etmişlerdir. Geleneksel ataerkil toplumda eve kapatılan kadını eğitip geliştirmenin zorluğunun da bilincinde olan bu aydınlar, hem kadın sorununun varlığını kabullenmişler hem de sorunu çözmek amacıyla kızlara özel okullar açılması için çalışmalar yürütmüşlerdir. Sözü edilen çalışmaların sonucu olarak yeni yüzyılda bilinçli ve eğitilmiş yeni bir kuşak ortaya çıkmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Güney Kafkasya, Azerbaycan, Milli Burjuazi, Kadınlar, Poligami.

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## Introduction

Imperial Russia expanded into the South Caucasus in the early nineteenth century, conquering what are now Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. For a time thereafter, the central government attempted to protect the local administration in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, in 1845 all authority was transferred to the Caucasus General Governorate, which was directly subordinated to the central government. Prince Mikhail Vorontsov the first governor-general of the Caucasus, cooperated with the local elite to pacify the region. As a result, with the December Notification of Nicholas I on the recommendation of the governor in 1846, local lords were promoted to the status of Russian *dворяни* (middle-class landowners) by recognising their rights over the land, and a Muslim “privileged class” emerged. Moreover, the members of the “privileged class” were given the opportunity to rise in the civil and administrative mechanisms. For this purpose, the General Governorate arranged Caucasian educational scholarships for those wishing to undergo training that would enable them to work in the civil service.

Thus, a class of expert bureaucrats from Azerbaijan emerged who had their share of European education. This was a new factor in the traditional society (Swietochowski, 1985: 10-14). All this allowed the emergence of an intellectual group that would initiate the transformation of Azerbaijani society in the future. The first cohort of intellectuals were those who worked in the military and civil service (Swietochowski, 1985: 23-24). It is worth mentioning that this group, which acted as the first cultural bridge, was also influenced by Russian Romantic writers and political exiles, whose central administration was exiled to the Caucasus because of the ideas of the Decembrists (Heyat, 202: 45). In the second half of the century, enlightened people began to emerge, especially graduates of Russian universities and the Transcaucasian teachers' seminaries in Tbilisi and Gori (Swietochowski, 1985: 24).

Thus, the modernising tendencies in Imperial Russia also affected the situation of Caucasian Muslim Turks in the 19th century. In order to keep up with the conditions of the age, they were interested in Western-oriented ways of thinking and living, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, trying to preserve their traditional Islamic identity (Altstadt, 2016: 6-9). The new lifestyle of the new era naturally impacted the traditional Muslim family. Within the tension between modernity and tradition, the Muslim community faced conflicts and tensions. Muslim Turkic women in the South Caucasus were particularly affected by this situation.

According to Ahmad Javanshir, an educator trained in Europe, girls should not be deprived of their rights; they should not be raised as dolls for the entertainment of the stronger gender. Deprived of all their rights, these women later became humiliated, speechless, and lawless slaves. He contemplated that the Muslim society, which had this attitude toward women, was like a body in which one half was paralysed and only the other half functioned (Cavanşir, 2012: 66-67). For this reason, Javanshir tried to educate his wife. Even when he lived in a country house in Khankend, he used to dress his wife in European style and she would walk unveiled along the boulevard. The Muslims, especially the nobles, were very upset with his behaviour. All this led to many rumours about Javanshir. One said he was an infidel, another that he had become apostate, and another still that he had renounced his religion and become a Russian. From then on, people called him Russian Ahmed (Cavanşir, 2012: 57-58).

We can take Ahmet Agaoglu's family as an example of this kind of family. While his uncle raised Agaoglu to be an *akhund* (clergyman), following tradition, his mother was against this situation. In his diary Agaoglu mentioned:

*"There was a secret fight between my burly uncle, Mirza Mehmet, the tribal chief, and my little mother, who did not dare to sit next to him and open her chador. My mother did not like akhunds, mullahs. She did not like the strange clothes, turbans, robes, and shoes of the akhunds and mullahs. She pointed out, 'They were always frauds and deceptions; I did not want to see my son like that.'"* (S. Ağaoğlu, 2003: 11; S. Ağaoğlu, 1940: 68-69).

The different lifestyles of the Russians, who adapted quickly to the West, and the Armenians and Georgians who followed them, shattered family traditions that the Turks and Muslims still tried to keep alive. Like the men, the women wanted to have their own homes and raise their children the way they wanted. They were now going against the will of the men. This event shows an example of a family under the rule of a great-uncle that took the path of paternal degeneracy. Consequently, Ahmet Agaoglu broke the will of the head of the family with his mother's decision. He studied at Georgian, Russian, and French schools and universities (S. Ağaoğlu, 1940: 68-69; S. Ağaoğlu, 2003: 11).

As a result of this education, Agaoglu, legendary for his courageous arguments for the education of Muslim Turkic women, asked to marry during his stay in Shusha. He was called Frenk Ahmed because he defied conservative circles with his European behaviour without making any concessions. Therefore, no family agreed to let him marry their daughter (S. Ağaoğlu, 2011: 215).

Among other things, the young generation sent to various European cities to further their education found a different atmosphere upon their return. So these young civilised Muslims were under the influence of modernity. Some even brought women with them because they could not find suitable women of their liking in their homeland (Veliçko, 1990: 176-177; Süleymanov, 2012: 137). Since the local women were illiterate, they did not fit into the men's worldview (Nerimanov, 2019: 23-24). One day one of these students said to Haji Zeynalabidin Taghiyev<sup>1</sup>:

*"Haji Efendi (sir), you got a promise from us that we will not marry a non-Turkic woman. But in our country there are no Turkic girls attending schools. Is it appropriate for an intelligent and educated person to marry an uneducated girl?"* (Keykurun, 1998: 181).

As a result of this conversation, the first Muslim girls' school, from which the first female teachers in the South Caucasus would emerge in the following years, was opened in Baku on October 7, 1901 (Altstadt, 1992: 33-34).

In light of this, a sociocultural need for women arose for the first time in the middle of the 19th century. The woman who had been confined to her home and had no rights now had a sacred duty: modernising society. To illuminate this argument in the first title of the article, I try to create the model of the "Traditional Caucasian Muslim Turkic Woman" that existed when Imperial Russia came to Southern Caucasus. To my knowledge, such research has not been done before. With this intention, I employed the articles published in the *Molla Nesreddin* magazine, *Ek-inçi* (ploughman), and *Shergi-Rus* (East-Russia) newspapers, and some travelogues and memoirs such as Vasil Lvovich Velichko's *Kavkaz: russ-koe delo i mezhduplemennye voprosy* ("The Caucasus. Russian Affairs, and Intertribal Problems), Banine's "Days in the Caucasus", Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii's "Mullah Nur", and Alexandre Dumas' "Voyage to the Caucasus".

The article's second title is "The Caucasian Muslim Turkic Woman in the Imperial Russian Era". To clarify why I chose such a title- the 'woman question' was born in this epoch. Women devoted their lives to train-

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<sup>1</sup> Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev was a Baku millionaire. His fortune, believed to be the largest in the Caucasus, was rooted in oil from an earthquake on his small estate. Later, his oil refinery investment rapidly increased his wealth through extensive land and stock market speculation. Over time, he moved out of the oil industry, established Azerbaijan's first cotton mill, and invested in tobacco and cotton-growing areas. Despite his lack of education, Tagiyev provided extensive financial support to education and charities. The new intelligentsia, together with the bourgeoisie, formed the modernising elite of Azerbaijan and benefited greatly from his generosity (Keykurun, 1998: 178-179; Swietochowski, 1985: 23).

ing educated Caucasian Muslim Turkic Women. Some women who realised their unlawfulness emerged and struggled for the education of women. So, in the second half of the 19th century, the Caucasian Muslim Turkic Woman in the Russian Era was a new model of a woman which would expand her struggle at the beginning of the 20th century.

### **The Sources and Historiography**

It is worth noting that until the end of the 19th century there is no source describing the situation of women in this period. However, when the modernisation movement began in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijani intellectuals began to publish a number of newspapers and magazines to draw attention to social problems. For example, *Ekinçi*, the first publication organ in Azerbaijani, appeared under the editorship of Hasan Zardabi (Mehmetzade, 1991: 15). Here, the injustice women laboured under and the importance of women's education were widely discussed.

The *Şerqi-Rus* newspaper is a socio-political, economic, scientific, and literary newspaper published three times a week in Azerbaijani in Tbilisi since 1903. The newspaper addressed the updating of the alphabet, the issue of the hijab, the dissemination of knowledge, the improvement of education in schools, etc (Mahmudov, 2005: 374).

The magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, which started to be published on April 7, 1906 by Jalil Memmedguluzade, was an important step in the development of the 20th-century Azerbaijani press and political ideas. It was the first humorous magazine published in Azerbaijan. The *Journal of Molla Nasreddin*, famous because of the way it ridiculed women in pictures and caricatures, attracted a great deal of interest and tried to enlighten people (Molla Nasreddin: Polemics, 2017: 3). Therefore it found itself right at the centre of interest because of its variety of topics concerning women and original ideas (Molla Nasreddin: Polemics, 2017: 66-110).

The Russian writer Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii (1797-1837) was exiled to the Caucasus for his participation in the Decembrist uprising in December 1825. Marlinskii, who spent the last eight years of his life in the Caucasus, wrote many stories and novels reflecting the lifestyle, traditions, moral and spiritual values and political structure of the region. The novel *Mullah Nur* is one of them.

The protagonists of the novel, *Iskender bey* and *Kıçkine*, fall in love with each other. But Kıçkine's patron, Mir Haji Fethali Ismailoğlu, intends to marry her off to an old man because he is rich. Here Kıçkine is an example of women who had no rights.

The outstanding French writer Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) travelled to Azerbaijan in the middle of the 19th century. In his work enti-

tled *Voyage to the Caucasus*, he provided information about the customs, history, and prominent people he met in Azerbaijan.

The Russian writer Vasil Lvovich Velichko (1860-1904) reported on the inhabitants of the Caucasus and their customs in his work *Kavkaz: russkoe delo i mezhduplemennye voprosy*.

The famous writer Banine (1905-1992), who lived and created in France, was a descendant of millionaires from Baku and moved to France with her family in 1923. She built the theme of her book *Days in the Caucasus* on the basis of facts from her biography. Many famous families of Baku, holidays and mourning ceremonies, customs and problems of that time are mentioned in this work. This work contains very valuable information about the mood of the time and the current position of women.

As for the historiography of the subject, it has generally been studied by English-speaking historians dealing with Central Asia or the Soviet period. The Azerbaijani woman of the Imperial Russian period was not subjected to research. But the two most recent studies on the transformation of Azerbaijani women have tried to fill the gap in this field.

These are Farideh Heyat's socio-anthropological research study entitled *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan* and Yelena Abdullayeva's doctoral thesis, *Crafting the Modern Woman in Azerbaijan: Muslim Women, the State, and Modernity 1900-1939*. Both works, on the basis of literary studies and periodicals, explore the influence of the enlightenment movement that started in the late Imperial Russian period on the shaping of the life of Azerbaijani women.

### **Before the Awakening: The Subjugation of Azerbaijani Women in the Pre-Reform Era**

Before the settlement of Russia in the South Caucasus, Muslim Turkic women did not have fundamental rights and freedoms. The sources indicate that they were not even granted the basic rights of animals and plants to grow and breathe freely (A. Ağaoğlu, 1985: 13-14; Sultanova, 1964: 14; DB-TDA, fon no. 571, kutu no. 34477, gömlek no. 135742, sıra no. 8).<sup>2</sup> These unfortunate and oppressed women were treated as being even lower than animals from time to time (Şamçızade, 1992: 105). Since women were not considered human, there was no need to ask them what was on their minds. Because the woman's mind was deemed to be limited, she could only be busy sewing and cooking (Bestujev-Marlinski, 2021: 29). They were seen as necessary for farming and giving birth to human beings. They were also required for entertainment

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<sup>2</sup> "A wife was something you throw into the house and close the door (Nemanzade, 2006: 259)."

(Ağamalıoğlu, 1929: 44). For these reasons, a woman could not make decisions on her own behalf and could not continue her life without the protection of a man. They were left to the initiative of their father, their husband, or the man accompanying them. This gave men the right to kidnap women and enslave them (Hesenzade, 2005: 463).

The woman's lack of will allowed several exploiters to appear spontaneously. Some wealth-loving men, who made their living by marrying wealthy women whose husbands had died, would remain with them until their wealth was exhausted, then divorce them under some pretext and become 'customers' of other wealthy widows. Women accepted marriage with these people to end the community gossip so that there would be a man with a *papaq* (hat)<sup>3</sup> in the house (Süleymanov, 2012: 52).

In the given period, although Muslim Turkic women in the South Caucasus suffered, men had various rights. Likewise, since morals were specific to women, a woman known for infidelity was not accepted into the house or society. Wherever she went, she was seen as disgusting and despised. But a man who committed adultery was not despised (A. Ağaoğlu, 2013: 43). For this reason, in public, where celibacy (being unmarried) was viewed as worse than polygamy, men had the right to marry three, four, or more women (Banine, 2019: 15). They could indulge in *siğə* (temporary wedlock) as much as they desired (Ağamalıoğlu, 1929: 4).

This process created conditions for fathers to marry off their daughters at a younger age to receive the bride price (Şamcızade, 1992: 105), so much so that a father could marry his young aged child daughter to an old man with several wives, which was considered normal in society (Beydili, 2007: 233-234; Gorani, 1984: 62-73).<sup>4</sup>

If the prospective groom could not afford to pay the bride price and the girl's family did not agree to the marriage, cases of kidnapping and elopement of the girl occurred (Heyat, 2002: 63; Nemanzade, 2006: 50-51).

Couples usually got to know and learn about each other after getting married, and marriages were disharmonious and discordant as a result of chance. Even before the wedding, there was no mention of true love, because true love between two people was seen as something that occurs after they had known each other for a long time and there was

<sup>3</sup> At that time, people wore a *papaq* (hat). It was considered a symbol of masculinity.

<sup>4</sup> A sea will appear if you collect the tears of the little girls we dragged into the private room (Beydili, 2007: 257).

complete harmony between their moods and hearts (Sarabski, 1939: 88; Beydili, 2007: 263-264). Furthermore, in these conjugal arrangements, all rights were assigned to one side and all duties to the other (Ağaoğlu, 2013: 69-74). According to this right, the husband was the master of the wife, and her main job was to give birth to children (Banine, 2019: 25-27).

For these reasons, women were born as maidservants, and when they got married, they called their husbands “my owner”. If these women saw happy days for five to ten years in their life, this was during the period of their girlhood. A small amount of respect rose during the engagement period. When a woman got married, she would go down to the level of a ‘carpet on the floor’ (Beydili, 2007: 112-113). After a girl got married, she went to a real prison. As a servant and an enslaved person, she did the work (Guliyev, 1930: 30). If the girl complained about her husband, her parent would state:

*“My daughter, be patient, the husband is the second God of the wife, the house cannot be without words, the grave is not without torment. You go from your house to the grave. Like a hat, you cannot be put on a different head every time.”* (Sarabski, 1939: 88; Nerimanov, 2019: 23-25).

Because honour belonged to a woman. The honour of a woman measured a man’s dignity. A man whose wife was closed up was considered dignified (Heyat, 2002: 62; Ağamalıoğlu, 1929: 4). The Tatars had an expression: “A girl looking out of the window is like an apple tree growing in front of a mill.” (Bestujev-Marlinski, 2021: 46).

That is why they even covered the holes that cats could pass through with stone walls (Bestujev-Marlinski, 2021: 46). It emphasises that the issue of honour made a woman wear a chador from childhood (Guliyev, 1930: 30). In those years, a Turkic woman in Baku could not walk with her husband in the streets with her head uncovered. Conservative people would not tolerate this sight (Baykara, 1966: 136). Women had to cover themselves with veils so that *namehrem*s (strangers) could not see their faces (Essad Bey, 1931: 50).

The practice of veiling, however, varied in its form and extent according to different regions. The *chadra* (chador) and *charshaf* (a variation of the chador) were commonly worn in the Baku region and in the east and south-east of Azerbaijan, where the Persian influence was significant. It was associated with the bazaar and the trading class (Heyat, 2002: 62; Sultanova, 1964: 15). So, when women from noble families and high



society went out, they had to wear a *knitted niqab* (Recebli, 2007: 307).<sup>5</sup> Khurshudbanu Natevan (1832-1897), a famous writer of Azerbaijan and one of the enlightened women of her time, despite all her advanced views, hid her face behind a *rübend*<sup>6</sup> when she appeared in front of people (Mövsüмова, 2002: 151).

Alexandre Dumas pointed out in his work "Voyage to the Caucasus" that the wife and daughter, Khurshudbanu Natevan, of the last khan of Karabakh, Mehdigulu Khan, wore a chador during their meeting (Dumas, 1985: 45).

According to the Islamic rule, men who were not related by blood to women were entitled to marry them, and therefore, women had to cover themselves in the presence of men (Abdullayeva, 2020: 70). A more radical version of this was that a newly-married woman had to cover her head and hide her face from a stranger and her father-in-law until she had a child (Recebli, 2007: 307).

These women were starved from time to time by their husbands. Their husbands left them alone at home and followed other women. Their husbands confiscated their property and invested in gambling; when they protested, they were beaten (Şamçızade, 1992: 95-97).

In the houses that were polygamous, the wife rarely saw her husband. She accompanied her husband's other wives on their days, worked together with them, and raised their children (Banine, 2019: 25-27). Sometimes, a fight might start between these women. They used to poison and kill each other (Sarabski, 1939: 89).

Such a condition of life forced women who had no other entertainment to lead a life full of fanaticism. They did not miss any weddings and funerals so as to enjoy themselves a little (Guliyev, 1930: 30). Fortune-telling and writing love prayers were also part of this type of work (Nemanzade, 2006: 261). By way of illustration, if a girl did not get married it was a significant problem for her parents, so when it was time for her to leave, they would go to the mosque, light a candle, and pray for their luck.

There were objective reasons for this.<sup>7</sup> These girls did not go to school, did not work, and thought about a husband when they were old enough (Recebli, 2007: 313-314). There were also several reasons why women were absent from education. There were no schools for girls, so

<sup>5</sup> A *niqab* is an Islamic face covering that covers almost the entire face and hair of women down to their shoulders. Part of the hijab family of traditional Islamic women's clothing, the *niqab* is recognisable only because of the slits that reveal a woman's eyes.

<sup>6</sup> The part that hangs over the eyes is a women's headdress made of a square piece of netting.

<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it was easy to discipline a young girl.

girls were forbidden to go to the madrasahs that provided religious education, and even to the primary schools where boys went.

The Turks did not send their daughters to school so that their honour would not be harmed (Vezirov, 2015: 18; Ağamalıoğlu, 1929: 15). We will see below that a tremendous struggle it was to change this situation.

### **The Evolution of Azerbaijani Muslim Women's Education and Social Roles in the Russian Imperial Context**

In the second half of the 18th century and in the early 19th century, the age of enlightenment began in Russia with the influence of Western Europe. In this period, enlighteners emerged who saw themselves as responsible for the future of their country and started a struggle against obscurantism (Walicki, 1980: XIV-XVI).

As a continuation of this process, "the woman question" emerged, related to the Crimean War in Russia in the mid-19th century. The lack of trained women staff to be sent to the front line brought up the issue of women's education (Stites, 1978: 29-38).<sup>8</sup> The poet Mikhail Larionovitch Mikhailov even began to seriously discuss women's emancipation in a series of articles (Stites, 1978: 38). The next serious wave was liberal-minded feminists. Primarily, they were supporters of the gradual progress of women's education and economic position (Stites, 1978: 64). The ideologists of the women's education movement later became ardent defenders of women's rights. Although the number of women completing secondary education in 1880 was slightly less than that of men, they did not receive any higher education in Russia. In 1889 and 1890, most of the female students at the University of Paris were Russian. Later, many of these women became members of international women's organisations and were instrumental in making some legal changes in favour of women by establishing various women's organisations in Russia (Heyat, 2002: 85-86; Edmondson, 1992: 77-96).

The enlightenment movements initiated by this group also showed their effect on the lands that were colonies of Russia. The improvement of nations brought the issue of women into question (Lazzorini, 1973: 237-238; Badran, 1995: 3-4; Heyat, 2002: 65). Some writers in Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of women in society in their works. Thus, poetic stories emerged such as *Zevce-i Ahir* and *Hayasız Derviş ve İsmetli Kadın* (The Immortal Dervish and the Honourable Woman), written by Gasim Bey Zakir, as texts criticising the moral understanding of the clas-

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<sup>8</sup> The position of Russian women in the same period is described in detail in these books: *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture*, ed. Rosslyn and Tosi; Rosenthal, "The Silver Age: highpoint for women?", *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union* 32-43.

sical period. They drew attention to the disadvantaged position of Azerbaijani women in the community (Zakir, 2005: 129-158; Develi, 2021: 207). Another example is the story *Reşit Bey and Saadet Hanım*, written in French in 1835 by Ismayil Kutkashensky.

Kutkashensky, who was caught in the liberalism movement of the age, drew attention to the sad state of Azerbaijani women in the traditional society in his work and tried to convey this through Saadet Hanım, who was portrayed as an enlightened character in the story (Develi, 2021: 213).<sup>9</sup> Reşit Bey, the protagonist of the story, is against patriarchal life. He craves the new Western-style life and loves freedom. Unlike the Eastern woman who does not see anyone except her own ancestors and her siblings, Saadet Hanım is a sophisticated Turkish girl. These young people get married by opposing traditional customs of marriage and by mutual and civil agreement (Baykara, 1966: 109).

Mirza Fatali Akhundov, whom Vorontsov called the "Tatar Molière", gained fame with the first European-style plays written in the Azeri language. In the comedies he wrote between 1850 and 1855, Azerbaijani society's sick and flawed aspects were somehow based on ignorance or superstition (Swietochowski, 1985: 24; Asker, 2021: 17). Most importantly, this type of literature directly appealed to the public and opened the eyes of the broad masses of people (Caferoğlu, 1940: 25; Mehmetzade, 1991: 14).

In Akhundov's comedies, the lives, wishes and dreams, problems, and positions of the people of different classes in Azerbaijan were depicted (Akhundov 11). One of them was a woman who was an essential member of society at that time who was made a prisoner. In his plays, he gave women the status they deserved in society. Akhundov displayed in the types of women he chose that they were human above all else and that a woman could be wise and brave (Baykara, 1966: 156; Abdullayeva, 2020: 62-64).

Thence, Akhundov's heroines differ in their thoughts and positions in their families and lives. In the comedy *Mr. Jordan and Dervish Mesteli-Shah*, one of the women belongs to the provincial nobility.

Sherefnise is a modest, powerless, speechless girl, and her mother, Shehrabanu, is a world-viewing, experienced woman with the ability to defend her interests (Akhundov, 1982: 14).

It should be noted that to compose the female model desired by these intellectuals, it was required to attract women to education. A significant obstacle lay ahead because the existing schools needed to be fixed.

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<sup>9</sup> The details of the subject are described in Ismayil Bey Gutqasınli: "Reşid bey ve Seadet xanim", (Baku: Genclik, 1971).

In the middle of the 19th century, there were two sorts of Muslim ecclesiastical schools in the South Caucasus: schools and madrasahs. In these schools, the principles of the religion of Islam and reading the Koran were taught to children (Devlet, 2014: 16). The primary purpose of education in schools is to equip students with the basic knowledge that would enable them to continue their life as Muslims and to educate the talented at preparing for the madrasah (Swietochowski, 1985: 29). These schools were mainly established in houses and mosques. Secular sciences could not be taught (Abdullayeva, 2020: 47-48). Although the quality of education at the school varied from school to school, they were generally pitifully low quality by modern standards. The *Kaspi* newspaper in Baku wrote that "schools do not deserve to be called schools" (Swietochowski, 1985: 29-30).

However, this education was not exclusively for women. Very few women had the opportunity to go to mullah schools. These were mainly for the children of the nobility. At the same time, in parallel with the mullakhanas founded within the mosques, special schools were organised by women in their homes. In the middle of the 19th century, two women named Meshedi Sekine and Khirdakhanim opened a private school for girls in their own homes (Ehmedov, 1985: 203-204). In 1850, a school was opened by Küllübeyim in the city of Shamakhi. Education here lasted four years, and no tuition fees were charged. The Koran was read here, Sharia was taught, and worldly sciences were taught (Ceferzade, 1969: 9). However, this process was basically implemented in cities. Poor girls had almost no access to education (Ehmedov, 1985: 203-204).

In line with Russia's policy of consolidation in the Caucasus, Russian girls' schools were opened by the government in parallel to mullakhanas. On the initiative of Vorontsov, a charitable society named *Saint Nina* was established in Tbilisi in 1846. This society, which lived on the income obtained from donations and membership fees, soon opened Saint Nina girls' schools on May 5, 1846 in Tbilisi, on May 14, 1847 in Kutaisi, and on April 30, 1848 in Shamakhi. Although mainly wealthy children were educated there, the active participation of Azerbaijani women in charitable society increased the interest of Azerbaijani girls in education and learning the Russian language (Ehmedov, 1985: 204-206).

The centre of the Saint Nina women's charitable society was located in Tbilisi, and its branches were instituted in Shamakhi, Baku, Gence, and Yerevan. The rich noblewomen of Azerbaijan, eager to spread knowledge and civilisation in the country, participated actively in the work of this society. Seventeen members of the society's Baku branch

were Azerbaijani women such as Chimnaz Bakikhanova, Beyim Esirbeyova, Khanım Mammedova, Anna Mehmandarova, and Sherebani Aghabeyova.

Even though their passion for charitable societies met with the resistance of religious fanatics, it gave impetus to the growth of progressive tendencies (Genceli, 1994: 61-63). Although the number of Azerbaijani girls in these schools was not large, the process led to development. Intellectuals educated in Russian-language schools felt the need to open a new style of girls' school.

In this way, Seyyid Ezim Shirvani fought at length with a lack of education, poor family discipline, and female captivity by constantly trying to cure the social diseases of the people. He waged war against immorality: bribery, kidnapping, and honour crimes like sexual assault (Refik, 1932: 33).

As a result of this struggle, in 1869, the first Western-style *Usul-i Cedid* (new education method)<sup>10</sup> school in the history of Azerbaijan was opened by Seyyid Ezim Shirvani in Shamakhi. This school played a constructive and influential role in the history of Azerbaijani reform for more than 20 years (Baykara, 1966: 171).

Jalil Memmedguluzade, one of the first initiators of teaching Azerbaijani girls in a new way, thought of opening a school for girls when he started teaching in Nakhchivan.<sup>11</sup> In 1893, while working at the Nehrem village school, he attracted eight girls to the school (Memmedli, 1984:

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<sup>10</sup> Usul-i Jadid. According to this method established by İsmail Gaspıralı, reading and rote learning based on spelling were rejected, and reading and writing were given equal importance. Gaspıralı considered the Usul-i Jadid issue as a matter of vital importance. So he had to leave the Zincirli Madrasah, where he worked, because he criticised the old method of education. Gaspıralı first expressed this idea in his book *Russkoe Musulmanstvo* (Russian Islam), which he published in 1881, and emphasised the necessity of reforming madrasahs. The first Usul-i Jadid school which he opened in the Kaymazağa District of Bahçesaray in 1884 had a significant impact. Gaspıralı applied the vowel method called Usul-i sevtiye in the school. So the students were learning letters instead of memorising syllables. The curriculum included courses on science, geography, and modern languages. In addition, classical literature education was being replaced by contemporary Turkish. One of the main goals of Gaspıralı was to provide schools with modern education and to ensure the equality of men and women (Swietochowski, 1985: 30-32; Gradszkova, 2019: 35-40; James Forsyth, 2013; Zenkovsky, 1960: 30-35; Mehmetzade, 1991: 15-16; Lazzorini, 1973: 249-251; Bennigsen, 1984: 21; Devlet, 2011: 59-71).

<sup>11</sup> Jalil Memmedguluzade, in his autobiography, mentioned that in 1888, when he graduated from the Gori Teachers' Seminary and returned to Nakhchivan, he met his friends. Through his close friend and confidant Eyneli Sultanov, he became acquainted with a book by John Stuart Mill, a prominent advocate of women's emancipation. For the first time, he saw this book's words defending women's rights (Memmedguluzade, 1958: 754-760). The book in question was John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*.

25). Encouraging girls to go to school in the village of Nehrem, where fanaticism was deeply entrenched, was an act of great courage. He enrolled his sister Sakine Memmedguluzade, Ümbül, the daughter of Kazıyev, the school's teacher of religion, and Shehrebanu, the daughter of Adiguzelov, the honorary supervisor of the school, to encourage the village people to send their daughters to the school (Ehmedov, 1985: 215). Establishing a dedicated class for girls next to the boys' school was the first step to creating new girls' schools.

In 1894, a new style of school named "Terbiye (nurture, bringing up, education)" was opened in Nakhchivan by Memmed Taghi Sidgi, an active advocate of women's rights (Memmedov, 1968: 49-53). At the same time, a separate class for girls was opened in this school, which played the role of a centre of social and political opinion. It should be noted that the textbooks written by Sidgi were implemented for the first time in the school he opened. His "Gift to Girls" textbook was essential for girls' education (Hebibbeyli, 2009: 204-206).

In this textbook, which consists of several articles and stories such as "Polite and well-mannered Rubaba", "Sitara and her aunt", "A parent's love", and "Ruqiyya's conversation", Sidgi calls for women to be educated and fight for their rights. According to Sidgi, since the mother gives the child their first education, she has a great responsibility. If mothers are knowledgeable, they mix science and love and cherish it with the child. In this textbook, valuable information was given regarding women's education and progress, such as child-rearing, child care, receiving guests, and decorating the table (Sidqi, 2004: 101-116). His story "Conversation of Two Sisters" has the subtitle: "Nothing in the world can be done without science. Human dignity and the difference between humans and animals is known by science (Sidqi, 2004: 107)."

Sidgi also wrote a series of poems to encourage girls to become educated. The poem "The Glory of Science" was the first educational poetic reminder in Azerbaijani literature to be dedicated to schoolgirls (Sidqi, 2004: 20).

At the end of the 19th century, it was a great skill to open such a class for girls in a religious place in a remote region like Nakhchivan. Despite the attacks of the city's clerics, mullahs, and mujtahids, Sidgi did not turn away from his progressive ideas and managed to organise girls' education.

The reformist and educator Hasan Zardabi recommended in all his articles that the nation should adopt modern civilisation and open schools in the European style. He did not accept existing patriarchal rules, and wished to save children from the slavery of their fathers, that of the wife from her husband and the enslaved person from their mas-

ters (Hesenzade, 2005: 418-419; Mehmetzade, 1991: 15). For this reason, Zardabi attributed great importance to women's education.

The author dealt with many issues, such as women's place in society, women's perspectives, and the effect of social values on women. He was firmly against the abduction of girls. He believed in raising the public's respect for women and that women's opinions should be taken into consideration, especially in decisions concerning them. The author, who opposed the fact that women were bought and sold as if they were goods and seen as weak and second-class, wanted women to find the value they deserved. He explained the harm to families who married off their daughters early and recommended that the marriage age be 20-25 years for girls and 25-30 years for boys. He opposed consanguineous marriages and tried to explain with evidence that the risk of congenital disabilities was high (Yeşilot, 2012: 107-110).

Zardabi remarked that no matter how many schools were opened for men, it would not be possible to reach the desired goal because women were excluded from science and education. However, women played a significant role in the upbringing of the young generation (Ehmedov, 1985: 213). In this process, Zardabi's most outstanding assistant was his wife, a Tbilisi Saint Nina school graduate, Hanifa Malikova. Malikova was worried about the powerless, *ignoramus* life of Azerbaijani girls and underage marriage. She gathered young village girls to change the situation and gave free lessons (Memmedov, 1960: 10-12).

However, the public did not want girls to be educated along side boys because of the moral norms of the time. Therefore, the idea of opening a school with a new method only for girls came into question. Hanifa Malikova and her husband Zardabi had the idea of opening a school for Muslim girls for the first time in Azerbaijan. Zardabi applied to the Governor of Baku on January 19, 1896, and asked for permission to open a school for Muslim girls in Baku with a four-year education period. After the investigations, Zardabi, who was thought to be politically disreputable and harmful to the state, was not allowed to open a school (Ehmedov, 1985: 217-218). Thereupon, Zardabi presented his idea to Haji Zeynalabidin Taghiyev, one of the benevolent rich men of the time (Baykara, 1966: 146). In his letter to Muhammad Shahtakhtli (1846-1931) of May 4, 1896, Taghiyev expressed his concerns about this issue. He stated that school was the only way to save a Muslim woman from a closed, fanatical life. However, the school had to adopt a structure that all Muslims would accept (Cabbarov, 2011: 30-31). The project was approved on May 16, 1898, after prolonged correspondence between Taghiyev and the authorities of the Caucasian Education Department (Cabbarov, 2011: 41). After all the problems were resolved, action was

taken to build the school. The construction of the school started in June 1898 and was completed in September 1901 (Kandiyoti, 1987: 112; Kaspiy, no.114; DB-TDA, fon no. 507, kutu no. 44818, gömlek no. 216191, sıra no. 67). The school had its grand opening on October 7, 1901 (Ehmedov, 1985: 219; Kaspiy, no. 219).

According to the charter of the school, the principal and teachers of the school had to be Azerbaijani women (Ehmedov, 1985: 220-221; İsmayilov ve Maksvell, 2008: 163). The school's principal was Hanifa Malikova, and the Russian language and maths teacher was Maria Mustafayevna. The Azerbaijani language and Sharia teacher was Esme Hafiz Mehemed Emin Efendi qızı (Cabbarov, 2011: 30-31). It was forbidden for males to enter this school except for the sweeper, who had to be married (Nerimanov, 2019: 21-25). According to the four-year school programme, Azerbaijani was taught for three years and Russian in the fourth year. Taghiyev had to cover the education expenses of 20 poor students. Although the school started with 34 students, the number began to increase after a while (Ehmedov, 1985: 220-221).

After Taghiyev's girls' school, Russian-Tatar girls' schools started to accrue in Azerbaijan. This meant an increase in the number of knowledgeable women. Therefore, these women would be able to unite in the future (from the beginning of the 20th century) to establish societies, send articles to media organs, and make their voices heard by a wider audience.

## **Conclusion**

When Russia settled in Transcaucasia, the women who lived in this region did not have any rights. They were governed by men, who were the dominant group in the community. Such a sovereign man could marry off his minor daughters and have as many wives as he wanted. On the other hand, the concept of honour silenced women's human rights and forced them to cover themselves physically. They used different versions of the chador so that strangers could not see them, such as the niqab, rüband, and parence. This closed life led women to a life full of fanaticism, such as fortune-telling and witchcraft.

The lack of education lay at the root of all these problems. At the time, no schools were teaching Muslim Turkic women. When the Russians arrived, there were two types of schools in the region, schools and madrasahs. Boys went to these schools only for religious education. Women were not allowed to go to the schools where only men went. However, special schools for women were established in the homes by some women; those who received general education were mainly the children of the nobility. The girls in poor and rural areas were wholly



deprived of education. But the fact that the "woman question" came to the fore in Russia had an impact in the South Caucasus. The need for women for the development of society caused the birth of the "woman question" there. Thus, the process of modernising women was carried out in two spheres.

On the one hand, the part of Imperial Russia, societies were created to attract women to education in the South Caucasus, and Russian-language schools were opened. On the other hand, Muslim Turkic intellectuals who studied at various universities in Europe and Russia and were influenced by the liberalism current in that era, fought to change the situation of women. They wrote articles on women's issues, opened schools with new methods, and tried to attract poor girls to these schools with all their might. However, this was insufficient to expand the process further. The intellectuals who were educated in the Russian language were aware that the Muslim population did not want to send their daughters to Russian-language schools. Opening a school that did not upset their religious feelings was necessary. Taghiyev, an important figure of the national bourgeoisie of Azerbaijan, solved this emergency. In 1901, the first girls' school addressed to the Muslim population was opened, and the religious sentiments of the nation were satisfied. We would see the graduates of this school on the front lines of the enlightenment movement in the future.

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