



## Periodicals on the Transformation of Turkic Muslim Women in the South Caucasus in Imperial Russia

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**Abstract:** *The press was a major vehicle for examining the role of women in traditionally Muslim Azerbaijani society. The principal objective of this article is to examine periodicals that address the transformation of Turkic-Muslim women in the South Caucasus between the years 1875 and 1917. During the aforementioned period, a number of media outlets were established by Azerbaijani intellectuals with the intention of enlightening society. By the beginning of the 20th century, a group of male writers had published several articles in these press organs with the objective of attracting women to education. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 20th century, a number of prominent women began to advocate for their rights as a result of a robust cultural awakening. The establishment of the first women's newspaper represented a significant milestone in the history of women's media in Azerbaijan. Until the fall of Russia, a considerable corpus of significant publications had emerged in Azerbaijan. Despite the existence of media outlets that adopt a radical stance, the prevailing message was that of an educated mother. This assumption was widely held and reflected the belief that only a mother with a good education could raise a child with a similar level of learning, which would, in turn, result in the salvation of society.*

**Keywords:** *The South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Woman Question, Molla Nasreddin, Ekinchi.*

### Introduction

Although the press has a long history on the global scale, the establishment of the periodical press in Azerbaijan is a phenomenon that can be dated to the latter half of the 19th century. At this juncture, Azerbaijani intellectuals began to recognize the potential of the press as a conduit for disseminating information on a broad scale. The press could serve as a platform for propagating ideas and influencing public opinion. Its reach extended beyond the educational sphere, encompassing both formal and informal domains. The press played a pivotal role in keeping the public informed about scientific, literary, and political developments. However, during the aforementioned period, the press in Azerbaijan was subject to rigorous supervision by Russia.

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Following the annexation of the South Caucasus by Russia, the latter commenced the publication of the newspaper *Tiflisskiy Vedomosti* in Tbilisi in 1828, with the objective of conducting a detailed study of these regions. It published materials on the history, folklore and literature of the Azerbaijani people. From 1832 onwards, a supplement to this newspaper was published in the Azerbaijani language under the name of *Tiflis Exbarı*. In 1841, the newspaper *Zaqafqazskiy Vestnik* commenced publication. In 1845, the supplement of this newspaper, *Qafqazın Bu Terefinin Xeberi* (News from this side of the Caucasus), was published in Azerbaijani. This publication primarily disseminated official orders and decrees issued by the government (Aşırılı, 2009, p. 6-10).

Given that these newspapers were largely aligned with the policy of strengthening Tsarist Russia, they had a negligible impact on the educational development of the Turkic Muslim population of the South Caucasus. It is noteworthy that the inaugural national, independent press of Azerbaijan was the newspaper *Ekinchi* (Ploughman), published in 1875 under the editorship of Hasan Zardabi (1837-1907) (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 28). His utilisation of the spoken vernacular in *Ekinchi* not only represented an assertion of local culture but also reflected the efforts of the educated elite to bridge the gap between themselves and the rest of society (Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks' Response to Russian Conquest*. 1986, p. 276).

Nariman Narimanov (1870-1925) observed that it is beneficial for Muslims to engage with the media. The press can play a constructive role when the issues under discussion are accessible to the public and can be understood by them (Narimanov, 1971, p. 29-31). In this context, the publicist Mirza Bala Mammadzade (1898-1959) highlighted in his work "Between Two Revolutions" that, while Mirza Fatali Akhundzade had introduced European thought into Azerbaijani literary and public opinion, Zardabi was responsible for its subsequent expansion and systematisation. *Ekinchi*, the proponent of the Enlightenment, was instrumental in the establishment of numerous press outlets in its wake. The ideas were subsequently disseminated by numerous newspapers and periodicals, including *Ziya* (Aurora), *Keshkul*, *Shargi-Rus* (Eastern Russia), *Hayat* (Life), *Irshad* (guide), *Molla Nasreddin*, *Debistan*, *Zenbur*, *Mekteb* (School), and *Fuyuzat* (Prosperity), as well as *Taze Hayat* (New Life) (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk Metbuatı*. 2004, p. 15-16). Following the cessation of *Ekinchi*, the newspaper *Ziya* was launched in Tbilisi in 1879, with the subsequent appearance of *Keshkül* in 1883. The *Shargi-Rus* newspaper, published in Tbilisi in 1903, was the final newspaper to emerge until the onset of the First Russian Revolution (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk metbuatı*. 2004, p. 15-16; Swietochowski, 1985, p. 29).

Following the initial Russian Revolution of 1905, a period of robust cultural activity commenced for the Turks of Azerbaijan. A number of printing houses were established. In 1905, the newspaper *Hayat* commenced publication under the editorship of Ahmet Agaoglu and Ali Huseynzade (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk metbuatı*. 2004, p. 41-42). Despite the subsequent publication of a number of newspapers, the most significant event in the history of the Azerbaijani press was the establishment of *Molla Nasreddin's* journal. The journal of Molla Nasreddin was first published in Tbilisi on 7 April 1906. It was subsequently published in Tbilisi from 1906 to 1917, in Tabriz in 1921 and in Baku from 1922 to 1931. In his work, *Azerbaijan Turkish Press*, Mirza Bala Mammadzade notes that Molla Nasreddin presented a straightforward and accessible approach to addressing the public shortcomings of individuals, who, in turn, were able to identify and rectify their own mistakes through the use of humor. For this reason, no other press organ achieved this goal as much as Molla Nasreddin. In the enlightened environment that it created, new press organs were established (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk Metbuatı*. 2004, p. 49-50). Among these newspapers, the most important for our topic and the development of society was the women's newspaper *Ishig* (light), which was founded in Baku in 1911. It was published once a week on Saturday and contained articles on literature, medicine and homemaking (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk metbuatı*. 2004, p. 61-62). Mirza Bala Mammadzade posited that the advent of women into various spheres of life, including literature, the press, theatre, culture, politics and social life more broadly, would precipitate a profound transformation. This perspective informed the editorial approach of the magazine *Ishig* (Mehemmedzade, *Azerbaycan Türk Metbuatı*. 2004, p. 24).

The press organs employed in the study have been utilised in a multitude of previous studies, with extensive research conducted using their input. This article presents a novel synthesis of diverse media organs that have prioritised the women's issue within their agendas. It should be noted that, for the purposes of this study, a selection of press organs that published articles on women's issues up until 1917, along with a few illustrative examples from the aforementioned periodicals, have been chosen for analysis.

### **Woman Question in the Press**

Azerbaijani reformists who emerged in the mid-19th century were cognizant of the fact that the most effective means of combating ignorance was through the medium of the press. Consequently, a number of press organisations were established by intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A substantial number of articles on significant matters were published in these press outlets. Of particular significance was the prominence afforded to the issue of women in the diverse array of subjects addressed by these periodicals. Prior to this, prominent

Azerbaijani writers such as Gasim Zakir, Ismayil Kutkashensky, Mirza Fatali Akhundzade and Seyyid Ezim Shirvani had highlighted the marginalised position of women in society. However, the lack of a press, particularly one in the native language, meant that the educational impact of these works was limited. Hasan Bey Zardabi was aware of this significant gap and, despite numerous challenges, began publishing the newspaper *Ekinchi* in 1875, marking the first Azerbaijani Turkish-language newspaper (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 28; Caferoğlu, 1940, p. 28). Consequently, the women's issue was addressed in the Azerbaijani press for the first time. A number of prominent Azerbaijani publicists, including Mirza Fatali Akhundzade, Seyyid Ezim Shirvani, Najaf Vazirov, Esger Agha Gorani, and others, contributed to *Ekinchi* with their insightful and thought-provoking articles. To illustrate, in the twelfth issue of the *Ekinchi* newspaper, Zardabi posited that the advancement of the European continent was attributable to the advent of European freedom. However, the traditions of our ancestors have effectively transformed us into willing slaves. The subject became enslaved to the monarch, the woman was subjugated by her husband, and the child was forced into servitude to their father (Hesenzade, 2005, p. 418-419). It was customary for men to abduct women and enslave them (Hesenzade, 2005, p. 463). Such patriarchal customs constituted an obstacle to progress. For this reason, Zardabi attached significant importance to the education of women. He was of the opinion that the provision of education would serve to emancipate women from the constraints of feudal norms. Consequently, Zardabi initially proposed the establishment of an educational facility for Muslim girls. On 19 January 1896, Zardabi approached the governor of Baku and requested permission to establish a school for Muslim girls in Baku, offering a four-year curriculum. Following an investigation, Zardabi, deemed politically disreputable and a potential threat to the state, was denied permission to open the school (Ehmedov, 1985, p. 2017-218). Zardabi then presented his proposal to Haji Zeynalabidin Taghiyev, a prominent and wealthy individual (Baykara, 1966, p. 146).

It is therefore possible to follow the progress of the Muslim girls' school project through another significant publication of the period, namely *Kaspi*. The newspaper *Kaspi* was first published in Baku in 1881. The inaugural editor of the Russian-language newspaper was Viktor Vasilyevich Kuzmin. Despite the fact that the newspaper was edited by Russians until 1897, Haji Zeynalabidin Taghiyev assumed control in 1897, with Alimardan Topchubashov subsequently assuming the role of editor (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 35; Münşi, 2014, p. 63). The pages of the newspaper also featured contributions from prominent Azerbaijani publicists, including Hasan Zardabi, Ahmet Agaoglu, Ali Huseynzade, Nariman Narimanov, Muhammad Shahtakhtli and Eynali Sultanov. Their writings addressed a range of socio-political issues, including women's rights and the prevalence of ignorance (Aşırılı, 2009, p. 76-79). The 120th issue of the *Kaspi*

newspaper, published in 1896, reveals that Taghiyev attempted to secure permission from the relevant authorities to establish a school for Muslim girls. This matter continued to be a subject of debate until the reign of Nicholas II. It was not until 1896 that the establishment of a girls' school was granted approval (Kaspiy, 1896 No. 120). In the 114th issue of the newspaper *Kaspi*, published in 1898, it was stated that the girls' school was named in honour of Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna (*Kaspiy*, 1898 No. 114). The school was inaugurated on 7 October 1901 at 12 o'clock. The establishment of the girls' school was met with considerable enthusiasm. Local residents and parents were actively involved in the initiative, which was perceived as a significant milestone. Another article in the *Kaspi* newspaper emphasised that this event represented a triumph of enlightenment over obscurantism. The individuals who had been instrumental in promoting women's education were observed to be visibly elated at the school's inauguration and expressed their hopes for its success (DB-TDA, fon no. 507, kutu no. 44818, gömlek no. 216191, sıra no. 67; *Kaspiy*, 1901 No. 218).

In the pages of *Kaspi*, Alimardan Topchubashov wrote on the occasion of the opening of the first Russian-Muslim girls' school in Baku that only an educated woman could provide her children with the initial impetus for intellectual and moral development, which would determine the direction of their future lives. However, for a Muslim woman to be considered wise, it is first and foremost necessary for her to reclaim the rights that have been denied to her on the basis of her gender and humanity. It was thought that a woman could only gain this right with the assistance of an educational establishment. The life of a Muslim woman is characterised by a lack of autonomy and mobility, which is further compounded by the absence of a regular school. The school for Muslim girls was of great importance as it was the inaugural educational establishment to establish the foundations for a woman's mental and spiritual development (Topçubaşov, 2018, p. 45-58). In accordance with the school's founding principles, the number of female students to be enrolled was set at 50 (*Kaspiy*, 1901 No. 90). However, due to the high number of applicants, 58 girls were admitted to the school in the first year. A total of 35 students were exempted from paying school fees on the grounds of their socioeconomic status. Taghiyev assumed responsibility for their financial obligations. In the initial phase of the project, 20 girls from impoverished backgrounds were identified as potential candidates (*Kaspiy*, 1901 No. 98; Mehemedzade, 2004, p. 35). Subsequently, as rental income from the building's basements increased, the school's budgetary allocation for free tuition was augmented by an additional 15 places (*Kaspiy*, 1901 No. 204).

As a consequence of this modernisation process, which commenced in the mid-19th century, the Turkic-Muslim women of the South Caucasus emerged at the beginning of the 20th century with

enhanced capabilities. Concurrently, the 1905 Russian Revolution resulted in the emergence of numerous press outlets, thereby further amplifying the discourse on women's issues. During the period spanning 1903 to 1912, a multitude of newspapers and magazines, including *Shargi-Rus*, *Hayat*, *Molla Nasreddin*, *Yeni Fuyuzat*, and *Kaspi*, addressed the subject of women's concerns.

The newspaper *Shargi-Rus*, which first appeared on 30 March 1903 under the leadership of Muhammad Shahtakhtli (1846-1931), introduced a new perspective on the issue of women's rights (Mahmudov, 2005, p. 374; Münşi, 2014, p. 66). In a series of articles entitled "A Little Every Day", Shahtakhtli advanced a compelling case for women's rights, demonstrating remarkable courage in the process. He observed that European women were advocating for their rights and inquired as to when Oriental women would commence this struggle. The author was the first to address the issue of the veil and to examine it from a new perspective. As a consequence of seclusion, women became feeble and entirely unresponsive to the external world, a phenomenon that he referred to as the "old illness of the East". In Shahtakhtli's view, states with free women were to be preferred. It is imperative that Muslim women address this issue with the utmost seriousness and resolve (Beydili, 2007, p. 40-41; Quliyev, 2006, p. 91). Additionally, he disregarded the notion that European women were perceived as "dishonourable" (Beydili, 2007, p. 50-51; Osmanova, 2013, p. 209). Conversely, he also held respect for women who wore the hijab, on the grounds that veiling represented their personal freedom. Indeed, veiling was prevalent in the Caucasus, and he contended that it was unjust to impose a divine edict upon women (Beydili, 2007, p. 53-55). Another writer, Omar Faig Nemanzadeh (1872-1937), published the story "Who is to blame?" in the *Shargi-Rus* newspaper, in which he drew attention to the problematic practice of bride price, which was prevalent at the time. The main character of the story, Ismail, is forced to remain separated from his beloved due to his inability to pay the bride price. Khadija is betrothed to another man without her knowledge (Nemanzade, 2006, p. 47-52).

The journal *Molla Nasreddin*, inaugurated on 7 April 1906 by Jalil Mammadguluzade (1866–1922), constituted a notable addition to the political and journalistic milieu of Azerbaijan in the 20th century (Axundov, 1968, p. 18-19). It is the inaugural satirical publication from Azerbaijan. In a departure from its customary format, *Molla Nasreddin's* journal, renowned for its satirical content, featured articles, illustrations of women, and caricatures that captured readers' attention and sought to provide enlightenment. *Molla Nasreddin* was read with pleasure by people from every class, including the noble and the ignorant (Beydili, 2007, p. 654-662; Resulzade, 2012, p. 386-390). Mahammad Amin Rasulzade observed that *Molla Nasreddin* was highly effective in carrying out the task of sabotage. It did not refrain from employing its incendiary and corrosive

irony in its critiques of those who represented the established order. It employed its most formidable tactics against the tenets of blind bigotry, the enslavement of thought and imagination, and the intolerance that these principles entail. The discredited tenets of the past were laid bare before it, and it exposed their absurdity, giving rise to a new era of laughter. It found humor in circumstances that would otherwise elicit tears. It was simultaneously laughing and crying. It was capable of laughter that verged on tears. It was acutely aware that we are destined to experience challenging periods (Resulzade, 2012, p. 386-390). This resulted in the magazine, which addressed a wide range of women's issues and presented original ideas, becoming a prominent publication (Molla Nasreddin, 2017, p. 66-110; Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 1992, p. 53-54; Memmedova, 2018 p. 72). In Molla Nasreddin's journal, advocates of women's rights gathered to discuss these issues. Omar Faig Nemanzadeh, Abdurrahim Hagverdiyev, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, and Ali Nazmi wrote numerous articles and poems about women's rights in Molla Nasreddin.

One of the issues identified by the writers, in particular Jalil Mammadguluzade, was the phenomenon of young girls marrying men in their sixties or seventies. Mammadguluzade, who described the situation as a "bloody tragedy," asserted that such marriages were tantamount to murder (Beydili, 2007, p. 257). In his article, "The Little Girl," Mammadguluzade highlighted the perception of girls as worthless. He made the ironic observation that a household with a female child was not considered a blessing. The birth of a female child was considered a misfortune for the family. In Russia, a man who abused a girl was subject to a sentence of exile for a period of twelve years in Siberia. In this country, if a man abused a young girl, the prevailing sentiment was one of approval (Beydili, 2007, p. 233-234). Mammadguluzade's "The Man is Coming" draws attention to the confinement of women behind four walls. Consequently, women in society were prohibited from conversing with strangers unless they were wearing a veil. He asserted that this was not a matter of Islamic law. Young girls were married off without having had the opportunity to experience the emotion of love. Their husbands were concerned that these girls would transfer their affections to another individual (Beydili, 2007, p. 263-264). Omar Faig Nemanzadeh, who endorsed this perspective, asserted in his article, "The Hijab Question and Our Answer," that the chador is prescribed by fabricated hadiths. Additionally, he presented the hadiths that asserted there was no impropriety in observing the hands, faces, and feet of women (Nemanzade, 2006, p. 269-274). Conversely, he highlighted an alternative perspective, asserting that it was not the Shariah that compelled women to cover themselves, but rather, it was the actions of ordinary Muslims. When men observed women on the street with their faces uncovered, they subjected them to prolonged and unblinking stares (Nemanzade, 2006, p. 266-267). In the pages of *Molla Nasreddin*, talag (divorce), another contentious issue of the time, was

subjected to ridicule. Among Muslims, there was a custom that a man who divorced his wife was not permitted to remarry her. However, if the woman had to marry another man for a few days, she could then divorce and marry her former husband (Nemanzade, 2006, p. 265-266). In his article entitled "A Few Days", Nemanzadeh draws attention to this custom, describing it as "a wild, funny and dishonourable custom" (Nemanzade, 2006, p. 275-276).

The journal *Yeni Fuyuzat*, published in Baku between 1910 and 1911, was discontinued by the Russian authorities after only 21 printed issues. However, it had gained acceptance for its educational character prior to this (Heşimli, 2010, p. 4). To illustrate, an article in the sixth issue of the magazine (1910) asserted that, according to the Holy Koran, Muslim women were not inferior to their contemporary European counterparts. Local traditions were found to contravene the rights of women. Polygamy, a practice that existed prior to the advent of Islam, was reformed and regulated following the acceptance of Islam (Heşimli, 2010, p. 121-125). It is noteworthy that the educator Yusif Ziya Talibzade (1877-1923) published a series of articles on the relationship between husband and wife in the pages of *Yeni Fuyuzat*. He posited that only authentic love could serve to reinforce the connection between a man and a woman. He underscored the notion that the sexes have been interdependent since the advent of humanity. For the bond between them to be healthy, both the man and the woman must fulfil their respective duties with dignity. Furthermore, Talibzade was critical of the notion that women are merely an adornment, bestowed with a multitude of adornments. The role of women was considered to be of greater significance. They were regarded as the mothers of humanity (Heşimli, 2010, p. 216-220). When the bond between a couple was no longer strong, the continuation of the marriage was seen as a form of enslavement. In response, Islamic Shari'a introduced the method of talag (divorce) as a solution. Consequently, divorce became as important as marriage. Both were seen as ways of promoting the happiness of the people. However, local customs that prohibited divorce and enslaved women meant that this was not always the case in practice (Heşimli, 2010, p. 306-310).

At the outset of the twentieth century, the press assumed a pivotal role in the discourse surrounding the issues that emerged during that period with particular reference to the status of women. Despite the efforts of various media outlets to foster social awareness of women's issues and their sociological context, these outlets were predominantly controlled by male interests. Consequently, no media outlet was capable of effectively conveying the nuances of women's experiences, including their emotional state, cognitive processes, and aspirations. The absence of media outlets catering to women's interests, a gap that had persisted for an extended period, was addressed by Khadija Alibeyova's leadership in 1911 (Qasimova, 2010, p. 6-19).



*Ishig* (Light), the inaugural women-oriented newspaper published by the editorial board of Khadija Alibeyova, ran from 22 January 1911 to 31 December 1912. In this endeavour, Khadija Alibeyova received considerable assistance from her husband, Mustafa Alibeyov (Axundov, 1965, p. 47; Münşi, 2014, p. 67-68).

The newspaper's permanent staff comprised women and male writers, who contributed articles to the *Ishig*. The *Ishig* newspaper concentrated on matters pertaining to women's education, their moral development and also addressed issues related to marriage, the veil and child rearing. On occasion, the newspaper attempted to draw attention to political and legal problems. At the same time, the newspaper reflected the perception of women in society with all the realities of the time. The newspaper emphasised that the development of society would be dependent on women's education and that these women were the builders of the future (Heyat, 2002, p. 208).

In her article published in *Ishig*, Helime Akhundova urged women to demand the restoration of their fundamental freedoms and to reclaim their violated rights. She posited that Muslim wives have become subjugated to such a degree due to their traditional role of cooking throughout the day. At night, we were compelled to seek refuge in a corner of the room, where we slept in a state of captivity. It was imperative that we liberate ourselves from this form of oppression (Qasımova, 2010, p. 32). Minure Alixanli wrote that until such time as we were permitted to engage with the world beyond the confines of the hijab and the restrictions imposed by the black niqab<sup>1</sup>, there was no possibility of our salvation (Qasımova, 2010, p. 35, Ceferli, Mirze, Aslanoğlu, 2022, p. 441). As Yusuf Vezirov stated in his article in *Ishig*, the root of the problems can be found in the isolation of women from social life and their lack of education. In order to establish a society devoid of issues, it was imperative to eradicate the circumstances that impeded women from pursuing education. It is therefore incumbent upon women to assert their rights with determination, speak truth to power and not be intimidated by the oppression directed against them (Qasımova, 2010, p. 15). Even Yusuf Ali, a writer who lauded the inauguration of *Ishig*, the inaugural press organ exclusively for women, posited in the sixth issue of *Yeni Fuyuzat* in 1911: "The lack of female literacy and education had perpetuated societal ignorance and poverty. The earliest educational environment for humans is the maternal womb. The more structured and conducive this environment is, the more optimal the subsequent education will be. With the advent of the *Ishig* newspaper, we have begun to challenge the lack of attention and resources allocated to our education (Qasımova, 2010, p. 330-331).

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<sup>1</sup> Niqab is an Islamic face-covering that covers almost the entire face and hair of women up to their shoulders. Part of the hijab family of traditional Islamic women's clothing, the niqab is recognizable only because of the slits that reveal a woman's eyes.

One of the most significant media outlets in the country was the *Achig Soz* newspaper. It is a daily socio-political, literary, and democratic international newspaper published in Baku between 1915 and 1918. The newspaper was established in 1915 by Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh (Mehmetzade, Milli Azərbaycan Hareketi. 1991, p. 45-46). The newspaper also provides insight into the 1917 conferences of Muslim nations, which sought to navigate the tumultuous era.

Shafiga Efendizade authored a number of articles on a variety of subjects for the *Achig Soz* newspaper, in addition to composing descriptive pieces for Muslim conferences. She published a series of articles in the *Achig Soz* newspaper under the title "All Muslim women Meeting in Kazan". The Congress of Kazan thus brought together women who shared a common experience of oppression (Efendizade, Seçilmiş eserleri. 2017, p. 349-351). The subjects under discussion included women's roles in society and the family, their political rights and the question of their representation in institutions. On the third day of the conference, Shafiga Efendizade delivered the following remarks in Turkish: "In this regard, I am gratified to observe that the long-awaited dawn of freedom has finally arrived for Muslim women, who have endured a prolonged period of oppression under the yoke of tyrannical rule". This resulted in the establishment of the freedom for women to form such communities without hindrance (Efendizade, Seçilmiş eserleri. 2017, p. 104).

Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, in his turn, described the All-Russian Muslim Congress in detail in the newspaper *Achig Soz* (Resulzade, 2013, p. 169-222). It is worthy of note that the Baku Muslim Women's Charitable Society dispatched delegates Shafiga Efendizade and Sara Vezirova to the Congress of Caucasian Muslims in Baku, while Sara Khurremovich represented the Muslim women of Tbilisi. Despite the restrictions placed upon them, namely the requirement to speak while wearing headscarves and gloves, their speeches were well-received by the intelligentsia. However, they were met with anger from the clergy. Ultimately, they were forcibly removed from the conference (Efendizade, Seçilmiş Eserleri. 2017, p. 340-348; *Menim Xatirelerim*. 1957 No. 24, p. 3; İmanov, 2003, p. 67-68; Həsənov, 2018, p. 48; Mehmetzede, "Kadınlara Hürriyyet". 1954, p. 2; Veliyev, 2006, p. 234). When this incident was commemorated at the All-Russian Muslim Congress, Rasulzadeh did not accept the expulsion of women and noted that the congress had adopted a resolution in favour of women. This resolution stated, "Taking into account the current situation of Muslim women and recognizing the need for them to have access to their rights as citizens, members of society, and participants in politics, the Caucasian Muslim Congress advocates for the empowerment of Muslim women."

## Conclusion

Upon their return from studies at various Russian universities, the Azerbaijanis were imbued with a sense of purpose and a set of ideas that would prove to be pivotal in shaping their future actions. It would have been prudent to engage the populace in the modernisation process, with a view to fostering societal development. Upon realising that their modernisation efforts were unsuccessful, he opted to engage with the public through the medium of the media. His *Ekinchi* newspaper was the initial catalyst for a profound cultural awakening among the Turkic Muslim population of the South Caucasus. The *Ekinchi* was followed by a plethora of other periodicals. In the course of this process, a number of issues were identified. As the editorial team grew, the scope of the publications expanded, encompassing a wider range of subjects. The initial efforts to encourage women to engage with education met with limited success, largely due to a lack of support from the female population. Subsequently, women became involved in the proceedings and engaged in the fight for their rights. *Molla Nasreddin*, in particular, selected the most efficacious methodology for the dissemination of knowledge among the populace. The intellectuals came to understand that the most effective means of enlightening the people was to communicate with them in a language that they could understand. In particular, *Molla Nasreddin* magazine employed the strategy of utilising cartoons to educate and inform illiterate people. By analysing *Molla Nasreddin's* cartoons from 1906 to 1931, it is possible to gain insight into the prevailing atmosphere of the time. Moreover, the most significant outcome of this process was the emergence of a female press organ in a society where clerics had previously proclaimed the existence of a women's newspaper to be a harbinger of doom. This press organ, known as *Ishig*, sought to illuminate the experiences and perspectives of women. It published a series of essays and hosted numerous discussions on the subject.

The objective of the narratives was to illustrate that the incidents in question were not inherently related to Islam or Sharia. These practices were the consequence of long-standing patriarchal traditions that had been in place for centuries. Such individuals would lead their lives in accordance with the principles of honesty and spirituality if the wider society were to adhere to the tenets of religious doctrine. However, in contravention of religious doctrine, they engaged in a plethora of immoral behaviour. They created hadiths for their own benefit, particularly in relation to women, in order to maintain their subjugation.

It is also noteworthy that the majority of articles in these journals addressed topics such as the education of women, the role of educated mothers, and child rearing practices. No prejudice was directed towards the male head of the family. The fundamental structure of the family unit remained intact. The overarching message was that of an educated mother. It is a commonly held belief that only a mother with a good education can raise a child with a similar level of learning.

This would result in the salvation of society. Furthermore, one of the most contentious issues was that of the hijab. The majority of writers from this period asserted that the hijab was not a mandatory requirement. Another challenging topic was the question of whether the hijab should be removed. In a statement published in the *Ishik* newspaper, the writers asserted that the removal of the hijab should not be the primary objective of society. However, the female writers of *Molla Nesreddin*, who espoused a more radical perspective, advocated for the abolition of the hijab.

The process is now entering its next phase. The women had already commenced their campaign for the right to vote. The courage of unveiled women to speak in front of men had already been demonstrated. Despite the generous modernisation of women until the Soviet era, it is evident that more radical steps were taken after this period. It is important to note that the modernisation process of women, which began in the mid-nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century, was significant in that it enabled local supporters to implement the Soviet ideology when it arrived.

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