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The Role of the Supreme State Authorities of the Nakhchivan ASSR in Developing Public Education and Culture

Abstract

This study analyzes the role of the supreme state authorities of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in shaping public education and culture between 1924 and 1990. Within the Soviet ideological framework, education and culture functioned as key instruments of political and social transformation. The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium acted as the main bodies responsible for legislative and administrative supervision in these fields. The research examines the governance structure, educational reforms, and cultural initiatives implemented under their direction. Educational policies focused on eradicating illiteracy, developing general and higher education institutions, and integrating ideological content into the curriculum. In the cultural sphere, theatres, museums, and libraries became tools for disseminating Soviet values while preserving selective elements of national heritage. The study concludes that, despite ideological constraints, the foundations established during this period formed the institutional and cultural basis of modern Nakhchivan.

Keywords: Nakhchivan ASSR, Supreme Soviet, Education, Culture, Soviet Ideology

Nakhchivan Özerk Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti'nin Kamu Eğitimi ve Kültürünün Gelişmesinde Yüksek Devlet Otoritelerinin Rolü

Öz

Bu çalışma, Nakhchivan Özerk Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti'nin (ÖSSC) 1924–1990 yılları arasında kamu eğitimi ve kültürünün şekillenmesinde yüksek devlet otoritelerinin rolünü incelemektedir. Sovyet ideolojik çerçevesi içinde eğitim ve kültür, siyasal ve toplumsal dönüşümün temel araçları olarak işlev görmüştür. Yüksek Sovyet ve onun Prezidyumu, bu alanlarda yasal ve idari denetimden sorumlu başlıca organlar olarak hareket etmiştir. Araştırma, bu kurumların yönlendirmesiyle uygulanan yönetim yapısını, eğitim reformlarını ve kültürel girişimleri incelemektedir. Eğitim politikaları

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okuryazarlığın ortadan kaldırılmasına, genel ve yükseköğretim kurumlarının geliştirilmesine ve müfredata ideolojik içeriğin entegrasyonuna odaklanmıştır. Kültürel alanda tiyatrolar, müzeler ve kütüphaneler, seçilmiş ulusal miras unsurlarını korurken Sovyet değerlerini yaymanın araçları hâline gelmiştir. Çalışma, ideolojik kısıtlamalara rağmen bu dönemde oluşturulan temellerin modern Nakhchivan'ın kurumsal ve kültürel yapısının temelini oluşturduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nakhchivan ÖSSC, Yüksek Sovyet, Eğitim, Kültür, Sovyet İdeolojisi

Introduction

During the Soviet period, the fields of education and culture constituted one of the main pillars of the state's ideological and social engineering policy. The aim of this policy was not merely to increase literacy rates and raise the cultural level of the population, but also to shape the model of the “socialist person” and to instill Soviet values into all strata of society. In this context, like all other constituent parts of the Soviet Union, the Azerbaijan SSR and its autonomous territory, the Nakhchivan ASSR, became local implementers of these overarching strategic objectives.

Established in 1924 with autonomous status within the Azerbaijan SSR, the Nakhchivan ASSR possessed both a geographically specific location and a distinctive cultural-political environment. Due to its position on the border with Iran and Turkey, the region of Nakhchivan held strategic significance for the Soviet leadership. Consequently, cultural and educational policy in the region served not only as a means of internal development but also as an ideological and political instrument (Aliyev, 2015).

The supreme state authorities of the Nakhchivan ASSR—particularly the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium—functioned both as bodies ensuring the local implementation of all-Union legislation and as institutions that carried out substantial initiatives in education and culture tailored to regional specificities. Through decisions ratified, programs adopted, and reforms implemented by these bodies, it became possible to establish educational infrastructure, create cultural institutions, and, to some extent, preserve national-cultural values (Quliyev, 2020).

The primary aim of this article is to analyze the role of the supreme state authorities of the Nakhchivan ASSR in the development of public education and culture, and to reveal the underlying state policies and ideologically oriented strategies that guided this activity. The main research questions are:

- What decisions did the Supreme Soviet adopt in the fields of education and culture?
- How was the local implementation of these decisions organized?
- What kind of relationship was established between state governance and national-cultural values?

The methodological approach includes historical-sociological analysis, the examination of archival documents, and the comparative analysis of scholarly literature. Based on these

sources, this study aims to demonstrate how state policy in the Nakhchivan ASSR regarding culture and education simultaneously carried both Sovietization and modernization functions.

State Structure and Governance Model of the Nakhchivan ASSR

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was established on 9 February 1924 as an autonomous administrative-territorial unit within the Azerbaijan SSR and, in accordance with the Constitution of the Soviet Union, acquired a special legal status. This status provided Nakhchivan with a degree of independence in internal administration while ensuring its integration into the broader governance mechanisms at the Union level. Although the state structure and governance model of the Nakhchivan ASSR were based on the general principles of the Soviet system, they also contained local specificities adapted to the socio-political, ethnic, and geopolitical features of the region (Aliyev, 2015).

From a legal perspective, the governance of the Nakhchivan ASSR was primarily enshrined in the 1937 Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR and the 1978 Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR. These documents emphasized that the Nakhchivan ASSR functioned as an autonomous republic within the Azerbaijan SSR, possessing its own supreme legislative, executive, and judicial authorities.

Nakhchivan's autonomy, owing to its location on the borders with Iran and Turkey, also served as an important geopolitical instrument for the Soviet leadership. In this respect, autonomy was utilized both as a political symbol and as a means of governance to represent central authority's interests and maintain ideological stability in the region (Quliyev, 2020).

The supreme governing body of the Nakhchivan ASSR was the Supreme Soviet. This body formally consisted of deputies elected by the population every four to five years. The main functions of the Supreme Soviet included the adoption of internal republican laws and the adaptation of Azerbaijan SSR legislation, the passing of resolutions concerning education, culture, healthcare, economy, and agriculture, the approval and oversight of the state budget, and the coordination of local soviets' activities.

Continuous leadership of the Supreme Soviet was carried out by its Presidium. The Presidium not only ensured the implementation of legislation between sessions but also performed functions similar to those of a head of state. Its chairperson was considered, in practice, the leader of the republic (Asadov, 2011). Standing commissions organized under the Supreme Soviet specialized in various sectors. Notably, the "Commission on Education and Culture" supervised the functioning of educational institutions, cultural centers, and press organs. These commissions also played an active role in drafting legislative proposals, planning budget expenditures, and gauging public opinion.

Executive authority in the Nakhchivan ASSR was exercised through the Council of Ministers. This body comprised ministries and committees operating in specific fields. Separate departments functioned for education, culture, healthcare, and internal affairs. These departments reported both to the corresponding bodies of the Azerbaijan SSR and the USSR, while also bearing responsibility before the Nakhchivan Supreme Soviet (Rzayev, 2014). At the local level, city and district soviets of people's deputies constituted the foundation of governance. Functioning as smaller-scale versions of the Supreme Soviet, these bodies dealt with the organization of cultural and educational events, the management of schools, the provision of libraries and museums, and the support of folk creativity in their respective regions.

In the governance model of the Nakhchivan ASSR, control over education and culture was not only organizational but also ideological. Educational programs, textbook content, and teacher training were centrally regulated in accordance with the directives of the USSR and the Azerbaijan SSR. However, these directives were sometimes adapted to align with local cultural values and historical heritage. Maintaining this balance was primarily the responsibility of local government bodies, particularly the commissions on education (Mammadov, 2008).

With regard to cultural policy, the state directly oversaw the activities of theatres, museums, and other cultural institutions. Repertoires were approved by central authorities, and their content was checked for compliance with Soviet ideology. At the same time, certain elements of national culture were preserved and promoted by the state, consistent with the principle of “national in form, socialist in content” (Yusifli, 2012).

The governance of the Nakhchivan ASSR possessed certain unique features. On one hand, the model was fully subordinated to the centralized administrative system of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the framework of autonomy allowed for certain local initiatives. For example, in some periods, the inclusion of national-cultural components into educational curricula was encouraged (Hasanov, 2019).

Nevertheless, the effective functioning of all these structures was directly linked to political stability, staffing, and ideological loyalty. Personnel selection was primarily conducted on the basis of party principles, which sometimes prioritized political reliability over professional competence. Due to ideological pressures, some local initiatives were restricted, and the development of education and culture remained constrained within the boundaries of state ideology (Ismayilov, 2017).

Formation and Organization of Educational Policy

Education, understood as schooling and general literacy, was one of the principal instruments for “human capital formation” within the Soviet ideological system. The leadership

of the USSR regarded education not only as a means of technical and intellectual development but also as a vehicle for transmitting and disseminating socialist ideology. This approach was clearly reflected in the Nakhchivan ASSR, an autonomous territory of the Azerbaijan SSR. Between 1920 and 1990, educational policy constituted one of the key directions of Nakhchivan's socio-economic development and was supported by the state with special attention and resources (Quliyev, 2020).

From the late 1920s onwards, large-scale campaigns to eradicate illiteracy were carried out across the Soviet Union, including in Nakhchivan. Given that the majority of the region's population lived in rural areas and that illiteracy rates were high, these measures carried strategic significance. Within the framework of the Likbez (likvidatsiya bezgramotnosti – “liquidation of illiteracy”) campaign, thousands of individuals attended evening schools and short-term literacy courses (Aliyev, 2015).

For this purpose, campaigns such as “Red Caravans” and “Literacy Weeks” were organized in Nakhchivan, and mobile teaching brigades were dispatched to remote mountain villages. According to a 1933 resolution of the Supreme Soviet, the literacy of all persons over the age of 12 had to be assessed, and those found illiterate were required to attend literacy courses (Mammadov, 2008). Between the 1930s and 1950s, school construction became one of the main priorities of the state budget. By 1940, more than 300 general education schools were operating in Nakhchivan. Although many of these schools functioned in one- or two-room buildings, the state sought to ensure planned expansion in this area (Asadov, 2011). The establishment of the Nakhchivan Teachers' Institute (later Pedagogical Institute) in 1947 marked a turning point in addressing the issue of pedagogical staff in a systematic manner. Thousands of teachers were trained at this institution in various specializations and continued their educational work in both urban and rural schools of the autonomous republic.

The education system's main structural tiers consisted of primary, seven-year, and full secondary schools. From the 1960s onward, technical vocational schools and secondary specialized institutions were incorporated into the system, thereby strengthening young people's preparation for the labor market (Rzayev, 2014). One of the important directions of educational policy was the inclusion of women—especially rural women—into formal education. The Soviet leadership declared the literacy and ideological training of women as a priority for their increased participation in public life. Statistical data from the 1940s and 1950s indicate a sharp increase in the number of girls receiving primary education in Nakhchivan compared to boys (Hasanov, 2019). Through resolutions of the Supreme Soviet and its education commissions, girls' schools and boarding institutions were opened in rural areas, and

awareness campaigns for parents were organized. This policy significantly raised the literacy rate among rural women in Nakhchivan and contributed to the modernization of society (Yusifli, 2012). Educational policy in the Nakhchivan ASSR aimed not only to transmit knowledge but also to promote socialist ideology. The content of textbooks, teacher guidelines, and school activities were subject to strict ideological supervision. In particular, history, literature, and civics lessons were designed to shape the image of the “Soviet citizen” (Quliyev, 2020). In schools, ideological training was conducted through Komsomol and Pioneer organizations, with holiday celebrations, “Lenin Corners,” and excursions dedicated to Soviet heroes. Teachers’ ideological loyalty was also deemed essential, and they regularly participated in party training sessions (Rzayev, 2014). As a result of these planned and systematic measures, illiteracy in Nakhchivan was virtually eradicated by the late 1970s, and secondary education coverage exceeded 90 percent. The emergence of scientific and cultural personnel in the region, the increase in pedagogical specialists, and the rise in women’s social activism were among the tangible outcomes of this policy (Aliyev, 2015). However, the fact that education remained entirely under state control, with alternative perspectives and creative approaches limited, meant that the development of the education sector was confined within a certain ideological framework. This would later create challenges in processes of renewal and modernization in education (Yusifli, 2012).

Cultural Development and State Ideology

During the Soviet period, the cultural sphere was regarded not merely as a domain of aesthetic and creative activity but also as one of the principal platforms for public ideological education. The aim of culture in this context was to shape the Soviet individual, to foster a “public consciousness” imbued with socialist values, and to disseminate communist ideology among the population (Yusifli, 2012). In the Nakhchivan ASSR, cultural policy served these same objectives, though it was also accompanied by efforts to preserve and promote local cultural heritage.

The main objectives of cultural policy in the Nakhchivan ASSR were aligned with the broader ideological and political goals of the Soviet Union. Among these objectives were the provision of aesthetic and ideological training to shape the Soviet citizen, the reinterpretation of history and cultural heritage within the socialist context, the promotion of loyalty to the Communist Party, the stimulation of civic engagement, and the reinforcement of Soviet symbolism across all spheres of public life. These goals were reflected both in the operational programs of cultural institutions and in the thematic content of artistic works (Rzayev, 2014).

The Standing Commission on Culture under the Supreme Soviet was responsible for planning cultural policy and overseeing its implementation. The organization of cultural events, the staffing of cultural institutions, the preservation of monuments, and the dissemination of educational programs formed part of the commission's daily agenda (Aliyev, 2015). The main carriers of culture in the Nakhchivan ASSR—such as theatres, museums, libraries, and houses of culture—operated under direct state supervision. These institutions functioned not only as centers for art and public education but also as venues for political and ideological activities.

The Nakhchivan State Musical Drama Theatre, for many years, served as the principal platform for performances based on Soviet dramaturgy. Its repertoire predominantly featured works written in the vein of socialist realism by authors such as Maxim Gorky, Alexander Ostrovsky, and Samad Vurgun (Huseynova, 2016). While plays related to national cultural heritage were also staged, they were adapted to fit the “socialist content, national form” principle and subjected to censorship.

The Nakhchivan History and Regional Studies Museum, along with other local museums, presented exhibitions that adhered to the official historical narrative of the state, approaching historical events from a Soviet perspective. Displays dedicated to the creation of village soviets, the collectivization movement, the history of the Communist Party, and the role of Soviet heroes in the Great Patriotic War held a prominent place (Ismayilov, 2017).

Libraries and houses of culture in rural areas were primary centers of cultural education. Activities such as reading conferences, political seminars, documentary film screenings, and Pioneer events played a significant role in the ideological upbringing of the population. The state provided these institutions with financial and organizational support while maintaining control over staffing (Mammadov, 2008). A distinctive duality can be observed in Soviet cultural policy: on the one hand, value was placed on national cultural heritage; on the other hand, that heritage was subordinated to socialist ideology. In the Nakhchivan ASSR, maintaining this balance was one of the subtleties of state policy.

The state protection of architectural monuments such as the Ajami Nakhchivani school, the Momine Khatun Mausoleum, and the Yusif Kuseyiroglu Mausoleum represented positive steps in preserving heritage, but these measures were simultaneously framed as evidence of the “richness of socialist cultural heritage” (Ismayilov, 2017). Budget allocations and technical resources for the restoration of these monuments also served as instruments of Soviet cultural self-affirmation.

Traditional arts such as mugham, ashig (minstrel) art, folk dances, and folk crafts were supported by the state under the rubric of “folk creativity.” Ensembles working in these fields

participated in cultural festivals; however, their repertoire and modes of presentation were subject to strict control. The preservation of national cultural values was encouraged only insofar as they were compatible with Soviet aesthetics (Hasanov, 2019). Within the Soviet ideological system, culture also functioned as a key platform for political mobilization. State holidays such as 1 May (International Workers' Day), 7 November (Anniversary of the October Revolution), and 9 May (Victory Day) were accompanied by large-scale cultural and mass events. In Nakhchivan, these celebrations took the form of staged compositions in theatres, poetry competitions, parades, and concert programs (Asadov, 2011). Through such events, Soviet symbolism was integrated into everyday life, reinforcing the ideas of loyalty to the Party and collective consciousness. In this way, state cultural policy in the Nakhchivan ASSR fulfilled both ideological and social integration functions.

Conclusion

The state policy implemented in the Nakhchivan ASSR in the fields of education and culture formed an integral part of the Soviet Union's broader ideological and social transformation strategy, while at the same time being adapted to the region's specific historical, geographical, and social conditions. The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium not only established the legal and political framework for this process but also introduced a systematic mechanism of supervision and planning in the spheres of education and culture.

In the field of education, measures such as the eradication of illiteracy, the construction of school and higher education infrastructure, the training of pedagogical staff, and the inclusion of women in education brought about significant intellectual and social changes within Nakhchivan society. At the same time, these policies were accompanied by ideological oversight, with the content of education being shaped as a vehicle for the dissemination of the communist worldview.

In the cultural sphere, the state played a decisive role: through theatres, museums, libraries, and houses of culture, Soviet ideology was instilled in the population, while the preservation of national cultural heritage was permitted only in forms compatible with ideological boundaries. The restoration of Nakhchivan's historical monuments, the promotion of selected elements of folk creativity, and the organization of cultural events served as tools both for social integration and for the consolidation of ideological influence.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the supreme state authorities of the Nakhchivan ASSR pursued a deliberate and well-planned course of action in the development of education and culture, providing substantial administrative and material support to these fields. However, this development took place within the confines of ideological control, with certain restrictions

placed on creative freedom and educational autonomy. Despite these limitations, many of the strategic steps taken during this period laid the foundations of Nakhchivan's modern educational and cultural heritage systems and formed the basis for their subsequent development.

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