

## GENERAL VIEW ON EDUCATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE BEGINNING OF XX CENTURY IN TIFLIS

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### Abstract

The waves of the fight for the education of Muslim women that started in the late nineteenth century, covered Tiflis in the beginning of twentieth century. During this period, Muslim intellectuals of Tiflis, understanding the importance of education of Muslim girls, address the governor of Russian emperor in Caucasus on the opening of educational institutions for Muslim girls. Muslim women of the city also join the fight for their educational rights. However, the tsarist government did not intend to take any measures for the solution of the problem.

Finally, the revolution that took place in the 1905-1906 in Russia encourages the solution of the problem. The representatives of tsarist government compulsorily pay attention to the requirements of progressive part of Muslim community. A number of steps were taken for the establishment of a school for Muslim girls. For this purpose, in March, 1906 a special commission was established. Among its members were also the representatives of Muslim intelligensiya.

In the article, the author has a look at the history of the Muslim girls' education and educational institutions in Tiflis, after revolution.

**Keywords:** Education, Tiflis

### XX YÜZYILIN BAŞLANGICINDA TİFLİS'TE MÜSLÜMAN KIZLARIN EĞİTİM SORUNUNA GENEL BAKIŞ

### Özet

XIX yüzyılın sonlarında Azerbaycan'da Müslüman kızların eğitimi için başlamış mücadelenin dalgaları XX yüzyılın başlarında Tiflis'i de sardı. Bu dönemde kızların maariflenmesinin büyük önemini anlayan Tiflis'in Müslüman aydınları Rusya çarının Kafkasya'daki canişinliğine Müslüman kızlar için ayrıca eğitim kurumlarının açılmasına dair başvurular ediyorlar. Kendi eğitim hakları için mücadeleye şehrin Müslüman kadınları da koşuyorlar. Ancak Çarlık hükümeti bu sorunun çözümü için hiçbir adım atmak niyetinde olmuyor.

Nihayet, sorunun çözümünü 1905-1906 yılları arasında Rusya'da yaşanan devrim başlatır. Çar yönetimi temsilcileri zorla Müslüman toplumunun ileri bölümünün taleplerine dikkat etmeli oluyorlar. Müslüman kızlar okulunun oluşturulması için bir takım adımlar atılıyor. Bu amaçla, 1906 yılının Mart ayında Müslüman entelektüellerin de üye olduğu özel komisyon oluşturulur.

Makalede devrimden sonra Tiflis kentinde Müslüman kızlar için açılmış eğitim-öğretim kurumlarının tarihçesine göz getirilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eğitim, Tiflis

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The waves of the fight for education of Muslim women that started in the late nineteenth century in Azerbaijan, covered Tiflis in the beginning of twentieth century. Understanding the importance of education of Muslim women, progressive Muslim community of Tiflis address appeals to the governor of Russian emperor in Caucasus on the opening of educational institutions for Muslim girls.

It should be noted that at that time, "Tatar" (Turkish) section within the Teachers Seminary in Gori was functioning. However, it was not enough to supply the great need of Muslim population for education. Especially there existed insurmountable obstacles in the way of education of Muslim women. Basically, this was deriving from two different factors:

1) Internal factors – A conservative thought manner ruled among the Muslim population. Misinterpretation of Islam which gives great importance for science and education of every human being regardless of sex, in many Muslim families created barrier for women's education;

2) External factors – Unlike other religious communities living under the rule of Russian Emperors, Muslims' education rights in native language, as in many areas, were not recognized.

From investigations of leading specialist of the history of education of Georgian Turks Prof. Dr. A. Pashayev it becomes clear that taking into account the existing needs and requests, a project for a special educational institution for Muslim women was planned.

In the project of a school for girls it was said: "The school is opening in Tiflis at the expense of the state treasury ... This educational institution intended for 60 pupils. Education period is 6 years. Following subjects are taught: 1 Religion classes, Sunni and Shiite; 2 Russian; 3 Turkish language; 4 Arithmetic, the initial geometry; 5 Russian geography and a short introduction to the general geography; 6 Penmanship; 7 Needlework; 8 Housekeeping". In addition, extra-curricular activities- sports and music. According to the project it was required to allocate 34,990 rubles a year to maintain the school. <sup>1</sup>

A lot of Muslims were looking forward to the establishment of the school. This was evident from numerous applications about admission to school.

<sup>1</sup> A.X.Пашаев. Очерки истории азербайджанской школы в Грузии в XIX- начале XX веков, Баку, 1997, с. 109-110.

However, the tsar government was not going to take any steps for implementation of the project. A number of written applications on this issue to the Russian Minister of National Education I.D.Delyanov were rejected.

It should be noted that in that period there existed 15 two classes, 14 one class girls' schools and about 150 mixed schools in the South Caucasus. 4,700 girls were studying in these schools.

Women's Charitable Organization that was established in Tiflis played a great role in organization of such schools with mixed composition. However, no one Muslim girl was studying in these educational institutions. The main reason for this, as mentioned above, was Muslim conservatism and traditions prohibiting the male teacher to be involved in girls' education. Such reasons were more actualizing the idea of opening a special school for Muslim girls and the Turkish-Muslim community was persistently demanding the opening of the school for girls. In November 1890, with the proposal to involve wealthy Muslims to establish this type of school, SheikhuIslam and Mufti of South Caucasus address the province governances, kazis.

Regarding this the Mufti of South Caucasus was writing: "Muslim men with great zeal long for getting education, that is crucially important for every human, in European languages and their number is increasing day by day. In this case, the representatives of the opposite sex also should be adapted to them with their mental development and education and be at the same level with them".<sup>2</sup>

Periodical press organs were also giving wide place in their pages to education problems of Muslim women. In one of such press organs it was written: "The opening of a school for Muslim women will be the beginning of a new era in the history of Muslim women in Caucasus."

Basing on his principle "Educating women to educate a nation", the well-known Baku merchant and philanthropist Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev at his own expense had constructed one-class Russian-"Tatar" girls' school with guesthouse in Baku<sup>3</sup>. However, in spite of intensive efforts of local Muslim community the issue in this direction in Tiflis still remained unresolved.

Finally, the revolution that took place in 1905-1906 in Russia encouraged the solution of the problem. Representatives of tsarist government compulsorily had to pay attention to the

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> F.Axundov. *Educating Women To Educate A Nation*, Baku, 2007.

requirements of progressive part of Muslim community. A number of steps were taken for the establishment of a school for Muslim girls and some prohibitions in this direction were taken off. Russian National Ministry of Education send a notification to heads of all educational institutions on the liquidation of all administrative decisions prohibiting Muslims to be engaged with education and getting student grant.<sup>4</sup>

In March 3, 1906, in Tiflis St. Nina educational institution for girls was held the opening ceremony of a Muslim chapel and a separate class where theology and native language would be taught to 50 Muslim pupils. It was built with financial resources of the wife of governor, countess Y.A.Vorontsova-Daskova. In the ceremony where the countess Y.A.Vorontsova-Dashkova, governor of Tiflis baron P.A.Raush-fon-Traubenberg, Azerbaijani intellectuals and the Congress representatives took part, I class pupil of St. Nina school Terequlova Selime says welcoming speech to the countess and expresses her gratitude for her care for Muslim community. Following this, the mufti Huseyin Efendi Gayibov who was invited to teach the native language and theology subjects in the special class, speaks about the creation history of the Muslim chapel and the special class and appreciates their significance for Muslims. Then the countess presents her speech. In her speech the wife of the governor expresses her feeling of happiness related with the opening of the chapel for Muslim students. She also mentions her certainty that this will create a guarantee for mothers of future - Muslim girls to be brought up in a religious spirit. Azerbaijani intellectuals taking part in the ceremony, Ahmad Bey Aghayev and Alimardan Bey Topchubasov, in their speeches talk about the great role that Muslim women played in social life in the first centuries when Islam was spread. They also note that Muslim women's being away from social activities has nothing to do with Islam. After the speeches Y.A.Vorontsova-Daskova reads the telegram of the Baku Muslim Women's charitable organization. By this organization a gracefully arranged Koran was gifted to the governor's wife. And booklets of "Woman in Islam and the Islamic world", author of which was Ahmed bey Agayev, were presented to Shariat teacher Hüseyin Efendi Gayibov to be distributed to students.<sup>5</sup>

In April 14, 1906, the newspaper "Tiflisskiy listok" was writing that the most worrying problem of Muslim population in the South Caucasus, is education. Especially a problem of opening educational institutions for girls. For this purpose under the chairmanship of deputy

<sup>4</sup> "Tiflisskiy listok", 1906, 22 March.

<sup>5</sup> "Novoye obozreniye", 1906, 5 March; "Kavkaz", 1906, 5 March.

head of education L.Q.Lopatinski a special commission was established and the following list of commission members was approved by the governor:

Mufti of South Caucasus Huseyin Efendi Gayibov, Sheykhulislam of South Caucasus akhund Əbdussələm Akhundzadeh, officials on special tasks near the governor - Allahyar bey Zulqadarov and Asildar bey Kazanalipov, translator of the Caucasus military district headquarters Mirza Sharif Mirzayev, chairman of Muslim Charity organization in Tiflis Ibrahim Aga Vekilov, police lieutenant Nadir bey Yadigarov, director of a Muslim school in Tiflis Ibrahim bey Terequlov, general-governor of Kutaisi, Major-General Magsud Alikhanov-Avarski's wife, Mrs. Zərribəyim Alikhanova, khan's wife Mrs Nisa Qaffari-Ibragimbekova, a widow Mrs. Hamida Davtdarova (Javanshir), the inspector of Trans-Caucasus Institute of Girls P.E. Melger and director of the Caucasus museum A.N.Koznakov.

Primary tasks of the Commission were to determine how would Russian-"Tatar" boarding school for girls be, to work out a project and cost estimates for the construction of school and boarding, and to determine and investigate the sum of the expenditure costs needed to maintain the school and girls in boarding.

Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev was elected the honorary chairman of the commission. Getting written information about it from the governor assistant Nikolay Aleksandrovich Sultan-Geray, he sends a letter of response where he expresses his thankfulness for the high respect and had these thoughts: "I have always and still strongly believe that only the educated and seriously enlightened Muslim mothers of our land will save our Muslims from ignorance and backwardness. My thought is adapted with real spirit of Islam and the great teacher of Islam. Always following this basis, within my opportunity, in words and in work, I was leading them to consciousness of my coreligionists".

However, such historical conditions hostile and unfavorable to Islam were being created that attempt of one person in this direction was not enough. Initiative of persons who had the authority and who were sensitive to the needs of population and in order to satisfy them and be ready to give up from formalities for the sake of work was needed.

In the issue of Muslim women's education, first of all, it was needed to deny general useless templates for the sake of work. At least, for the first time, the school for its structure and organization should not have contradicted with the thought of Muslims formed for centuries, and be possible and acceptable for them. In other words, the school needed to be a bit Islamized. However, no one dared to do that and template was winning. Sometimes even those

separate efforts in this direction were being destroyed in this template and the issue of national education and cultural development of Muslims, for their and state's detriment remained in freezing point"<sup>6</sup>.

Muslim women of Tiflis also join the struggle for their own rights for education. On July 1, 1907, the newspaper "Zakafkazye" published a letter of 30 Muslim women of Tiflis. The letter stated: "Every patience has its end. We, the representatives of Muslim women of Tiflis, express our anger and disgust for those who fight against our desires for freedom and development in an oral or written form... In the struggle for the women rights and freedom we will always fight shoulder to shoulder with our brothers ..."

Supporting the views of Muslim women, a number of intellectuals of the period also join their calls through the same newspaper.

It should be noted that as a result of tireless efforts of Muslim women in Tiflis and support of the primary forces, in 1908, the Muslim Women Organization was established in Tiflis.

From the research of Prof.Dr. A.Pashayev it becomes evident that women representatives of other nationalities also took an active part in the struggle for Muslim women's education. For instance, E.D. Aspisova appeals to the director of national schools of Tiflis province on granting her permission to open Private school for Muslim girls in Tiflis and in 1906 achieves in the opening of such a school. Aspisova wrote: "The aim of the school is to give education in Russian language and in the content of preparatory classes in secondary schools and to deal with the training and education of girls". Girls from the age of 7 up to 12 years old, were admitted to the school. The annual tuition fee was 60 rubles.

Russian and Azerbaijani languages, arithmetic, penmanship, needlework and Sharia lessons were included in the lessons plan of the school.

Firstly, 15 Moslem girls were accepted to Aspisova's school and five of them were released from payment of fee. High tuition fee was the main reason for small number of pupils. Material base of the school was poor. Well-known Muslim intellectuals such as Huseyn bay Minasazov, Gara bay Qarabayli, etc. through newspapers, address the city governance with the request to support the school. However, despite all efforts, the city administration does not allocate any means for operation of the school. The school of Aspisova compelled to be closed because of material need in 3 years.

<sup>6</sup> "Tiflisskiy listok", 1906, 14 April

The second such school for Muslim girls was opened in 1910. About 70 girls studied in this school. Tuition fee was not so high and education intended to be in 3 years period.

In the school Sharia, Russian, Turkish language, arithmetic and handicrafts classes were thought.

However, the school faces the same problem as was in Aspisova's school's case and in the beginning of 1912 it was forced to be closed.<sup>7</sup>

After closing of the private schools for Muslim girls it can be said that there does not remain any school for Muslim girls in Tiflis.

In spite of the short period function of above-mentioned educational institutions, they played a great role in education of Muslim girls and increase of inclinations for education.

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<sup>7</sup> A.X.Пашаев. *Очерки истории азербайджанской школы в Грузии в XIX- начале XX веков*, Баку, 1997, с. 117.