

## The Role of Cultural and Educational Institutions in the Development of Public Thought in The Early 20th Century

<sup>1</sup> Gahraman Behbudov

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### Abstract.

This article analyzes the significant role played by cultural and educational institutions in shaping and advancing public thought in Azerbaijan in the early 20th century. The study demonstrates that, under the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia, the development of national education became a fundamental instrument for preserving the national identity, language, and culture of the Azerbaijani people. The educational activities of prominent intellectuals such as Hasan bey Zardabi, Ali bey Huseynzade, Ahmad bey Agayev, Omar Faiq Nemanzade, and Muhammad Amin Rasulzade were decisive in awakening public consciousness and disseminating ideas of national progress.

The article also examines the influence of periodicals such as *Açıq Söz* (Open Word), *Füyuzat*, and *Dirilik*, as well as educational societies like *Nicat*, *Səadət*, and *Nəşri-Maarif*, and new-type schools on the national awakening process. Ultimately, the author notes that, in the early 20th century, cultural and educational institutions became not only centers of learning but also hubs for the development of national ideology and public thought. This educational movement laid the ideological groundwork for the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

### Keywords:

*cultural and educational institutions, public thought, national awakening*

### Introduction

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked an important turning point in the socio-political and cultural history of Azerbaijan. During this period, the impact of the industrial revolution led to significant transformations in economic relations, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the expansion of the labor movement, and the emergence of new directions in cultural and educational life. The enlightenment of the people, the elimination of illiteracy, and the development of national self-awareness became among the primary objectives of Azerbaijani intellectuals.

For Azerbaijani thinkers of this era, education was regarded as the principal path to achieving freedom, progress, and the preservation of national identity. Under such circumstances, schools, madrasahs, educational societies, press organs, and charitable institutions not only raised the socio-

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<sup>1</sup>Behbudov, Q. N. o. PhD in Law, Associate Professor, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan. Email: qehremanbehbudov@ndu.edu.az, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9934-9435>

cultural level of the population but also played an indispensable role in the formation and development of public opinion.

### The Historical Context and Necessity for the Emergence of Cultural and Educational Institutions

In the early 20th century, the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia created serious obstacles to the development of national education in the Caucasus, particularly in Azerbaijan. The Tsarist administration introduced numerous restrictions intended to weaken the national identity of Turkic-speaking peoples, subordinating national schools to a policy of Russification. In this regard, the “educational reform project” prepared by the Caucasus Director of Public Education, Rodolev, was particularly significant.

In the project, the Azerbaijani (Turkic) language was referred to as the “Tatar language,” and Russian was designated as the primary language of instruction. This policy was essentially aimed at destroying the national and cultural identity of the population. Azerbaijani intellectuals—including Omar Faiq Nemanzade, Muhammad Amin Rasulzade, and Ali bey Huseynzade—strongly criticized the project and engaged in enlightenment-oriented struggles through the press to defend the national language and education.

In his articles published in the newspaper *Açıq Söz* (especially the “What Do We Expect?” series), Omar Faiq warned that such an educational system would alienate children from their mother tongue and national identity, undermining the moral foundations of society. As he wrote: “*In these large schools that are being opened for us, everything exists—Russian education, Arabic knowledge, Persian poetry, Arabic faith—but one thing is missing: ourselves.*”

As a result, the reorganization of existing schools, the creation of new educational institutions, the training of teachers, and the implementation of national curricula became central priorities for Azerbaijani intellectuals.

### The Role of Education in the Formation of National Consciousness and Public Thought

The purpose of education extended beyond basic literacy; it sought to awaken national consciousness, self-awareness, and cultural identity. One of the most consistent advocates of this idea was M. A. Rasulzade, who emphasized that education served as the moral pillar of national existence. In his words: “*Language does not constitute the entirety of nationality, but it forms ninety percent of it as a dominant factor.*”

Azerbaijani intellectuals understood that national progress was only possible through the establishment of national schools, instruction in the mother tongue, and the dissemination of modern, secular knowledge. In this regard, newspapers and journals such as *Açıq Söz*, *Dirilik*,

*Füyuzat*, and *Yeni Füyuzat* played a critical role in enlightening society and developing public thought.

Through these publications, new ideas—such as liberty, equality before the law, education, women’s enlightenment, and national unity—were widely disseminated. Issues related to education and culture became subjects not just for intellectual debate but for public discussion at large.

Prominent figures such as Hasan bey Zardabi, Ali bey Huseynzade, and Ahmad bey Agayev viewed education as the key to social justice, progress, and freedom. In Zardabi’s view, ignorance kept the people in poverty and dependency, and only education could free them from such conditions.

### The Relationship Between Education, Culture, and the National Liberation Movement

By the early 20th century, the enlightenment movement in Azerbaijan had acquired a political character. Cultural and educational institutions—schools, educational societies, charities, and the press—became centers of socio-political awakening.

During this period, organizations such as *Nicat*, *Səadət*, *Nəşri-Maarif*, and *Cəmiyyəti-Xeyriyyə* were established. Their activities included opening schools, publishing books, training teachers, and promoting women’s education. New schools and cultural centers were founded in cities such as Baku, Ganja, Shusha, and Nakhchivan, transforming the enlightenment movement into a nationwide phenomenon. Behbudov, Q., & Bayramova, V. (2025).

These institutions were not merely places of learning; they were also spaces where national ideology was shaped. The intellectuals educated in these centers would later become the leading political and ideological figures of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

As Rasulzade emphasized in his series “School and Madrasah,” education had to instill not only loyalty to the state but also ensure the cultural development of the people. This concept became a crucial stage in the formation of national ideology.

### The Enlightenment Mission of the Press and Intellectuals

Alongside educational institutions, the press of the period played a decisive role in directing public thought. Newspapers and journals such as *Açıq Söz*, *İrşad*, *Füyuzat*, *Həyat*, and *Yeni Füyuzat* served as platforms for national awakening.

Articles published in these periodicals emphasized the importance of education and the preservation of national identity. Intellectuals including Nemanzade, Rasulzade, Huseynzade, and

Agayev criticized ignorance, illiteracy, and religious fanaticism, advocating science and education as the only path to progress.

Special attention was also given to the education of women and their role in society. The girls' school founded by H.Z. Taghiyev became a landmark event in the history of national education. Thanks to such initiatives, Azerbaijani women had already become active participants in cultural and social life by the early 20th century.

(Continuation of the last paragraph translated)

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept. In essence, education itself is part of this concept. However, there is a reason for distinguishing education as a separate category. Our aim is, first and foremost, to emphasize the great importance attributed to education during the period under study—1914–1917. At that time, Azerbaijani intellectuals were primarily concerned with the enlightenment, teaching, and education of the people. There was general consensus and, to some extent, unity of opinion on this matter. Educational issues constituted the main content of contemporary writings.

This concern also stemmed from the fact that Tsarism sought to radically modify the educational system of Muslims in the Caucasus. Under the pretext of expanding schools, a highly reactionary project was prepared that restricted the education of Turks and violated their national rights. Notably, the project referred to the “Turkish language” or “Azerbaijani language” as “Tatar language,” which was undoubtedly the product of an imperial policy aimed at undermining the moral foundations of the people.

M. A. Rasulzade wrote the following on this matter:

*“Language does not constitute the entirety of nationality, but it forms ninety percent of it as a dominant factor. This is why politicians who intend to destroy a nation begin the assimilation process by targeting the language first and strive to erase it from memory.”* (*Dirilik*, 1914, No. 6).

**How was the project we are discussing prepared, and by whom was it written?**

A careful examination of the period's press provides clear answers to these questions. The response can be found in Ömər Faiq's series of articles titled “*Nə umuyoruz?*” (“What Do We Expect?”). As becomes evident from these writings, the Caucasus Director of Public Education, Rodolev, had approached certain individuals separately in order to learn their opinions regarding education. Ömər Faiq wrote: “*As soon as I heard this news, I wrote that appealing to people individually would be harmful for our nation and that a collective meeting was absolutely necessary.*” (*Açıq söz*, 1916, No.108).

He justified his position as follows: *“Approaching individuals separately is harmful because the person whose opinion the education director wishes to learn—whom he esteems and recognizes—may very likely, due to our present upbringing and morals, serve more the wishes of the director rather than the interests of the nation.”* (ibid.)

From the very outset, it must be emphasized that the project drafted by Rodolev was extremely reactionary and directed against Muslims, particularly Turkic peoples. According to the project, the traditional Ömər and Əli schools were to be replaced by a three-tier school system.

**First level:** one alphabet class and three preparatory classes, for a total of four years. Subjects taught: religious studies, Russian, “Tatar” (Turkic), arithmetic and *türkü* (singing). Behbudov, Q., & Bayramova, V. (2025).

**Second level:** religious studies, Russian, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, history, geography, natural history, physics, drawing, “Tatar,” *türkü*, and gymnastics. All of these subjects were to be taught **in Russian**. Only two hours per week were allocated to the local language, and even these lessons were not compulsory. Moreover, local-language classes were scheduled at the end of the school day, when students were already exhausted—naturally causing them to neglect the lessons.

What is even more striking is that religious instruction was to be conducted **in Arabic**, while explanations were to be given in either Russian or “Tatar.” Regarding this, Ömər Faiq wrote: *“There must be a meaning behind the director’s disregard for our Turkish language and behind his claim that he is serving us in this way. However, despite being a renowned pedagogue, what can be the meaning of his working in a manner entirely contrary to pedagogy?”* (Açıq söz, 1916, No.108).

**The third level** consisted of specialized schools for training teachers, with a three-year curriculum. The goal was to prepare teachers of Turkish and religious subjects for primary Russo-Turkish schools. Subjects included: tafsir, Islamic history, fiqh, kalam, hadith studies, history of Islam, “Tatar,” Arabic, Persian, Russian, Russian history, geography, and pedagogy. Geography, history, and pedagogy were to be taught in Russian; the remaining subjects, in Arabic.

As is evident, the curriculum was excessively overloaded. Future primary-school teachers were expected to study highly complex subjects such as kalam and fiqh. Although these were undoubtedly important from a theological perspective, they were of little practical use to teachers working in elementary schools. Approaching the issue from this angle, Ömər Faiq rightly described the program as completely unworkable. He stated:

*“What is kalam? It is a branch of philosophy dealing with matters of divinity and conscience, filled with disputes and controversies among sectarians who have historically divided Muslims. What*

*need do future teachers of 'primary' Turkish schools have for this science?" (Açıq söz, 1916, No.108).*

He further elaborated: *"If we think more seriously and go further, we can boldly assert that primary-school teachers do not need not only kalam, but most of the subjects taught at that level. If those who are to teach in primary schools are instructed in such advanced subjects, then what sciences will be taught to those who are to become qazis, mudarris, and religious scholars?" (ibid.)*

In short, under the pretext of expanding existing schools, Tsarist authorities intended to implement an extremely reactionary educational project in the Caucasus. The project was specifically designed for the Turks of the region—i.e., Azerbaijanis—and clearly aimed at eroding their national and religious identity. By overloading the curriculum with unnecessary and overly difficult subjects, they sought to discourage children from studying, thus turning schools from centers of enlightenment into veritable “hellish chambers.”

Although Muslims generally maintained a moderate and even good-faith attitude toward Russia, the autocracy regarded its Muslim subjects—especially Turkic peoples—with hostility. It suppressed their national culture and language at every turn, erecting countless obstacles before education. It is therefore no coincidence that at the end of his article, referring to the new educational project, Ömər Faiq wrote:

*"We see that in these wide schools that are to be opened for us, there is everything: Russian education, Arabic knowledge, Persian poetry, Arabic faith and creed, even kalam. But one thing is missing. What is it? Ourselves!.." (Açıq söz, 1916, No.108).*

Ömər Faiq did not limit himself to criticizing the new project; he also courageously exposed the discriminatory educational policies and the biased treatment of Azerbaijanis. He revealed the privileges granted to non-Muslim peoples, especially Armenians, and demonstrated with irrefutable evidence that the autocracy took Armenians under its protection. Indeed, this was a well-known fact, noted not only by Ömər Faiq but by other Azerbaijani intellectuals as well. Yet Ömər Faiq addressed the issue with particular sharpness. For example, in the aforementioned “*Nə umuyoruz?*” series, he wrote: Öztürk, A., & Garibli, I. (2025).

*"For example, if in a government office, within a governorate, or even among neighbors, there are two nations who equally bear the burdens—taxes and obligations—of the state, yet one is governed under a privileged law while the other is governed under a restricted one, then naturally the second will feel distressed by this situation." (Açıq söz, 1916, No.110).*

**Perhaps Ömər Faiq was slandering Tsarist Russia?** Perhaps all nations in the empire were indeed treated equally, without discrimination, and everyone enjoyed the same rights? After all,

high-ranking tsarist officials constantly spoke—quite eloquently—of equality among nations and of interethnic harmony. In fact, in the article “*Milli məsələlərimizin vəqti?*” (“Time for Our National Issues?”) the following information was published:

*A few days ago, the director of the office of the Viceroy (namestnik) summoned the chief editors of newspapers in Tiflis and held a meeting with them. The purpose of this meeting was to convey the views and wishes of His Highness Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich concerning the Caucasus, and to remind them of the principles and foundations of his administrative approach. According to this explanation, the basis of our Viceroy’s administrative method is ‘justice and equality.’ And by this principle, he strongly desires to view all nations equally and to foster not conflict, but rather friendship and closeness among them. (Açıq söz, 1915, No. 54)*

There is no doubt that the intentions of His Highness the Grand Duke were noble and benevolent. Yet let us see how these words were implemented in actual life. One does not need to look far for the answer—reading M. A. Rəsulzadə’s series of articles titled “*Məktəb və mədrəsə*” (“School and Madrasa”) is sufficient.

Let us first examine what one of the Grand Duke’s own officials, the Caucasus Director of Public Education, Rodolev, mocks. Rodolev explicitly notes that Muslim educational societies in Baku have “*wasted their lives dreaming of teacher-training institutes and other higher schools.*” But what, exactly, is supposed to be a “fantasy” here?

Perhaps the “fantasy” lies in the fact that Muslims wished to accomplish this through their own initiative, according to their own taste and judgment. After centuries of deprivation, they finally sought to make use of their rightful claims. Perhaps the so-called “fantasy” consisted in their desire to reform their mosques, schools, and madrasas without submitting them to the supervision of the Education Directorate. (*Açıq söz, 1916, No. 138*)

Of course, for Muslim children a higher educational institution was indeed an unattainable dream. Tsarism opposed the enlightenment of Muslims because it feared that those whom it regarded as ignorant and backward might one day become educated, develop self-awareness, open their eyes to the colonial policies of autocracy, and eventually demand their natural rights. As a result, they would hinder the plundering of their national wealth and natural resources.

The harsher tsarism behaved toward Muslims, the more leniently it treated its “co-religionists.” Some were even favored excessively and indulged. For example, Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə wrote in one of the previously mentioned “*Məktəb və mədrəsə*” articles:

*“Muslims see that in the church schools of their next-door neighbors, which existed nearly a century ago, subjects such as religious law, Armenian, Russian, general history, agriculture, natural history, and Armenian history are taught. Of these subjects, only Russian history and*

*geography are taught in Russian; all remaining subjects—even general history—are taught in Armenian. All administrative matters of these schools, including the teachers, are under the authority of the church parish itself. Muslims see, as an undeniable fact, that aside from the primary church schools, there are also 85 ecclesiastical teacher-training colleges in six different places. Above all, the existence of the Ecclesiastical Academy in Echmiadzin is likewise no fantasy. How, then, can something that our neighbors achieved more than half a century ago be considered a dream or a fantasy for us today?” (Açıq söz, 1916, No. 138)*

It is not difficult to understand M. A. Rəsulzadə’s indignation. He could not remain silent in the face of the autocracy’s unjust treatment of Muslims. At that time, education was a source of light and hope for the people. Məhəmməd Əmin assigned a central role to education in national revival. His principal aim was the establishment of national schools whose graduates would understand the identity of their nation and religion, would reconnect with their people’s culture, and learn to love it. Therefore, he advocated the reform of existing schools and madrasas and sought to align them with the requirements of the time.

Contemplating school reform, he asked himself what the true purpose of the people’s schools—especially those belonging to subjugated and dependent nations—ought to be. As is evident, Məhəmməd Əmin took the existing reality into account, bitter though it was. The Azerbaijani people were still a dependent nation, lacking autonomy. Therefore, he had, willingly or unwillingly, to reckon with this situation. In a sense, he sought to bring the interests of the existing regime and the interests of his own nation as close together as possible. He believed it necessary to take advantage of whatever concessions Tsarism was prepared to grant.

**Thus, he answered his own question as follows:**

*“From a sound and impartial point of view, the duty and function of schools is to instill in their pupil’s loyalty and connectedness to the state in which they live, while at the same time serving as a cultural factor that contributes to the aspirations of their own nation.” (Açıq söz, 1916, No. 134)*

Hence, the primary function of schools is twofold: first, to cultivate in children a sense of loyalty and obedience to the state; and second, to nurture educated intellectuals who will enrich the culture of their own people. As can be seen, Rəsulzadə sought to unite state interests with national interests. Nevertheless, with the sentence that follows, he somewhat alters this balance, giving priority to national identity:

*“Therefore, the people’s schools that will educate Muslim children must also support the national aspirations and aims nurtured by the enlightened part of the Muslim community.” (ibid.)*

He approached schools from a broader perspective, regarding them as assistants to the progressive Azerbaijani intelligentsia. In other words, the students graduating from these schools were to

become the future patriots and devoted servants of their nation. They were to serve the people and spare no effort in doing so.

Rəsulzadə regarded the Muslims of Russia—with few exceptions—as belonging to the Turkic-Tatar ethnos. In his view, for Muslims to achieve anything in the field of culture, they must first realize the importance of unity among themselves. This sense of unity is the greatest cultural force. Any means that brings the Muslims of Russia closer to this idea must, he argued, be promoted by Muslim intellectuals. Stirring up sectarian conflicts among Russia's Muslims—sowing discord between them—was, in Rəsulzadə's view, a policy of imperialism. The state ought to renounce such a policy and should not fear the unity of Muslims. On the contrary, Muslim unity could prove highly beneficial for the state.

He wrote:

*“It has always been a misunderstanding to think that Muslims seek to abolish sectarian differences among themselves—for example, to unite Sunnis and Shi‘is—with a political purpose. It is imagined that if these two opposing sects unite, they must necessarily be motivated by political aims, harboring intentions of aggression; and that this supposed aggression stems from the so-called dangerous idea of Islamic unity (ittihadi-islam).”* (Açıq söz, 1916, No. 134)

Mammad Amin opposed the reactionary policy of Tsarism that sought to divide the Turkic peoples from one another in the field of education. He regarded the Turks of Russia as a single cultural entity and described their languages as various dialects of the Turkic language. At the same time, he considered himself a child of Russia, called Russia his homeland, and treated its supreme interests with respect. Referring to the growing cultural rapprochement among the Turkic peoples living within Russia, he wrote: *“If Russia is to become a homeland for the nations living within it, then there is no need to fear the aspirations and desires of the Turkic-Tatar peoples to move closer toward one another. For in that case, Russia would possess a culturally stronger offspring. But if, as before, the policy of ‘divide in order to rule’ continues to be pursued, then the situation... Of course, in order to be digested well, morsels must be small.”* (ibid.)

From the above passage it becomes evident that the domestic policy of Tsarism had become considerably milder compared to previous years. Since the foundations of the autocratic regime had begun to weaken, the Tsar could no longer keep the population in complete subjugation. He was making concessions—more precisely, he was compelled to do so. On the one hand, the war with Japan had shaken the Russian economy; on the other, the mass uprisings of the people against absolutism had brought the downfall of the regime perceptibly closer. Consequently, Tsarism was forced to carry out certain maneuvers in order to escape new blows. It resorted to various means to delay the collapse of the system and to gain time.

As noted above, Mammad Amin opposed the educational policies pursued in the Caucasus. As a result of this policy, the national and cultural rights of the Caucasian Turks were violated, and the people themselves suffered discrimination. The new project for the educational system was even more reactionary and regressive than its predecessor. In it, the national and cultural rights of the Turkic peoples were not only ignored but outright denied. Thus, in his series of articles “School and Madrasa,” Mammad Amin explicitly wrote that a deep contradiction existed between Mr. Rodolev, the director of the Caucasian educational system, and the general Muslim public opinion on this matter. He even called the issue of national schools and the cultural rapprochement of Turkic peoples “the cornerstones of national aspirations and ideals.” If these cornerstones were removed, the hopes cherished by the people would immediately collapse. Öztürk, A., & Garibli, I. (2025).

Tsarist Russia attempted to justify its harsh policy towards Muslim schools and madrasas with fabricated accusations. Allegedly, these institutions conducted anti-Russian propaganda and aimed to detach Muslims from the Russian state. Referring to Rodolev’s report, Mammad Amin wrote: *“In short, unbeknownst to the government, it seems that the dark, humid, and decrepit mosques and madrasas are very dangerous places. In the famous report of the vigilant viceroy, the late Vorontsov-Dashkov, it was claimed that tendencies toward pan-Islamism and separation from Russia were being nurtured here, in these mosques, schools, and madrasas. Who knows—perhaps when the late Vorontsov wrote that great slander, he made use of the report under discussion.”* (Açıq Söz newspaper, 1916, No. 135)

1. *The principal purpose of the Society is to reorganize the existing madrasas in the city of Baku according to the new method (usul-i jadid).*
2. *In accordance with the requirements of the age, to establish and develop new religious schools, teacher-training institutions (darulmuallimin), and other higher educational institutions.* (Açıq Söz newspaper, 1916, No. 138)

Rodolev could not tolerate in any way the opening of higher educational institutions and the genuine enlightenment of the people, and he immediately expressed his objections. Concerning this, Mammad Amin wrote: *“If Russia’s socio-political life takes a natural course, and if every nation is allowed to flourish upon its own roots and develop through its native culture, then surely the demands made in the first article of the Saadat Society’s charter would not be seen as fantasies—indeed, even broader national demands would not appear unattainable. But if, instead of the religious academies we request, we are presented with the imagined schools of Ali and Umar and ordered to be satisfied with them, then indeed the demand for religious academies becomes a mere dream...”* (Açıq Söz newspaper, 1916, No. 138)

Mammad Amin hoped for the democratic development of Tsarist Russia; therefore, he spoke of universities, religious academies, and even broader national demands. However, if the state

adopted the language of command, then there was no choice but to obey. In that case, all such aspirations would indeed remain dreams.

According to the new project, mosque schools were to be taken out of the hands of the clergy and transferred to the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Undoubtedly, this was an encroachment upon the rights of Muslims. Tsarism justified this move by claiming that anti-Russian propaganda was being conducted in Muslim schools and madrasas. Yet, in Mammad Amin's view, the fault was partly our own. We had despised these schools and failed to value them. Yet these institutions belonged to the nation, and its children studied there. As he wrote:

*“We looked down upon mosque schools and madrasas. We considered them lairs of ignorance and stagnation, said that the nation was being corrupted there, and labeled them centers of fanaticism. And indeed, many of them were so. Even today, many remain unreformed. But we forgot one thing—and herein lies our greatest mistake. This is the gravest error of our intelligentsia, those who understand the troubles of the age. We forgot that these institutions, whatever their condition, are ours...”* (Açıq Söz newspaper, 1916, No. 143)

## **Conclusion**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represent one of the most complex and turbulent periods in the history of the Azerbaijani people. At the beginning of this century, our nation lost its political independence, was divided, and transformed into a colony of the Iranian and Russian empires. In addition to the socio-political oppression and exploitation imposed on the masses, national subjugation was also added. On the other hand, the elimination of feudal fragmentation and internecine wars in the country created favorable conditions for the development of the economy, education, and culture.

Within this socio-political environment, nineteenth-century Azerbaijani thinkers—especially Akhundov and Zardabi—spoke out far more decisively than their predecessors, exposing the tsarist authorities, reactionary clerics, and all forms of exploitation, as well as the prevailing feudal-absolutist order and the colonial policies of the ruling circles. They openly criticized Eastern despotism, the fanaticism of religious figures, and the lack of rights of the people. Influenced by Western European and progressive Russian social thought, Akhundov and Zardabi went beyond their predecessors by advocating for broader public participation in state governance and for democratization of the political regime.

Although to some extent utopian, nineteenth-century Azerbaijani thinkers were, in essence, ideologists of the peasantry. They were unable to fully comprehend the nature of social exploitation, social injustice, and the mechanisms of political power. They criticized the corruption, illegality, and bribery inherent in the existing legal-judicial system, as well as the colonial methods characteristic of tsarist administrative governance.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, as in all other spheres of Azerbaijani life, sharp contradictions and social tensions were also evident in the societal landscape. Azerbaijani intellectuals, representing various strata of society yet united in their desire for national independence, socio-political progress, and cultural development, put forward diverse socio-political views. These ranged from enlightenment thought to revolutionary democracy, and from Turkism to Bolshevism. However, despite their tactical disagreements, it can objectively be stated that nearly all of these thinkers served the advancement and progress of the nation.

Among the most prominent representatives of Turkist ideology in this period were Ali bey Huseynzade, Ahmad bey Aghayev, and Mammad Amin Rasulzade. These influential thinkers enriched the ideology of Turkism by organically integrating the principles of Islamization and modernization, transforming it into a comprehensive doctrine and turning it into an ideological-political weapon for oppressed Turkic peoples. Although short-lived, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic—the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim East—and the Republic of Turkey, which stood firm against European imperialism, emerged as the results of this struggle for freedom. These figures also restored the traditions of independent Azerbaijani statehood and directly founded the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, a state based on democratic and modern principles and supported by the vast majority of the population.

Among these ideologues, Mammad Amin Rasulzade went even further by identifying the lessons to be learned from the fall of the Republic. Among these lessons, in addition to the direct aggression of the Red Army, he emphasized the treachery of national traitors and the errors committed by the republic's leadership—factors that still retain their relevance today. Rasulzade and his likeminded contemporaries demonstrated that the Soviet regime, which touted itself as a democratic “workers’ and peasants’ state,” was in no way different from European imperialism, aptly calling it “Red Imperialism.” With remarkable foresight, Rasulzade showed as early as the 1930s that Stalin’s dictatorship did not differ from the Hitler regime—an understanding to which many of us arrived only much later.

A number of their far-sighted ideas have not lost their relevance even today. Their socio-political thought constitutes some of the most valuable pages in the history of our intellectual traditions. The socio-political views and legal-political teachings of these prominent figures continue to retain their significance in the modern era.

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