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FIRST SCHOOLS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN GEORGIA (1906-1912)

Abstract:

Nearly hundred years (1783-1878) lasted the process of integration of the Caucasus into Russia. Territory of the Caucasus was officially called the Caucasus region or Krai (Caucasus region was divided into the Northern Caucasus and Transcaucasia), with its center in Tiflis (present-day Tbilisi, capital of Georgia). The Head of the Caucasus region was Viceroy (1844-1882, 1905-1917), in 1882-1905 - Vicegerent (namestnik) of civil part of the Caucasus. A third of Caucasian population represented Muslims, who tried to preserve their religious identity. They abstained from gaining an education at the state schools and restrained themselves only with a religious education. The Russian administration decided to take under its control an education for Muslims. The Viceroy of the Caucasus Mikhail Vorontsov (1844-1854) launched an initiative to establish Muslim schools, that would be state-approved education in Russian for Muslims. In 1847-1849 two schools were opened in Tiflis – for Sunni (Muslim school of the Teachings of Umar) and for Shia Muslims (Muslim school for Aliev sect) where Russian language, arithmetic, history and geography were also taught. After 2 years more 6 schools were opened: two of them for Sunni in Derbend and Shemakha and for Shia Muslims in Baku, Shemakha, Shusha and Elizavetpol. In 1853 separate Caucasian Education District was created and subordinated to the Ministry of Education of Russian Empire along with the other districts. At that time there were 1917 Muslim schools (25742 pupils) in the Caucasian Education District. However, in Georgia only from 1882 the activity of the Muslim community began to open schools for Muslim girls.

In the previous work, a history of Muslim women education and first schools in Tiflis will be discussed based on Georgian archives (Caucasus Islamic society in Georgian archives 1800-1917) relative to Caucasian Muslim community and protected materials in the periodical press.

Keywords:

Transcaucasia; Tiflis; Muslim women; education; school

JEL Classification: I29

Introduction (An idea of Muslim women education in the Transcaucasia)

An idea of Muslim women education in the Transcaucasia (now referred to as the South Caucasus) belongs to an Azerbaijani journalist and intellectual – Hasan Bey Malikov (Zardabi). His assistant was his wife Hanifa – a daughter of Aslanbeg Abaev, an officer of Imperial army. In 1873, Hasan Bey organized first theatre performance in Azerbaijani, Hanifa Khanum, who graduated Tiflis St. Nino School, established the first school for Muslim girls at her home. They were planning to open a private boarding school, but this undertaking needed some money, that family could not afford. An Azerbaijani Maecenas and merchant of the ‘first guild’ Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev was able to realize this idea. He addressed to Emperor Aleksandr III (Emperor Alexander III) with a request to permit opening a school for Muslim girls in Baku, where they were able to study in native language. Aleksandr III did not comply with this request. Later, G. Z. Taghiyev sent a very expensive gift to the wife of Emperor Nicholas II Alexandra Feodorovna for the Coronation ceremony and asked her solicitation for opening a school. On May 16, 1898 regulations of Baku Russian-Muslim women school was asserted, on May 26 a permission of Queen Alexandra Feodorovna was accepted that implicated awarding a school her name. On April 24, 1900 H.Z. Taghiyev transferred 125 000 rubles to a state bank, as this school should cover its existence expenses according to its percentage. On May 27, 1900 Emperor Nicholas II thanked H.Z. Taghiyev “for this generous present”. A construction of the school was realized by his donation (in total 184 000 rubles) (Jabbarov,2014; Documents and letters from the private archives of A. M. Topchibashi and J. Gajibeili,2012; Nazarli,2008; Akhundov,2007).

On October 9, 1901 was a solemn opening of the school. According to the regulations, it was a closed one-class school, and only Muslim girls from the age of seven could attend it. The course lasted for 4 years; the last year was intended for further professional class, where needlework was taught (Collection of Management Orders of Caucasian Educational District, 1897-1898, pp.701-705).

Classes began on 7 September, 1901. 58 girls were accepted at the school, 35 among them were from the poorest families and they were free of tuition fee. Lately, Nabat Narimanova – a graduate of this school remembered: “Nowhere in Muslim world, neither in Russia, nor in the Near and Middle East was such a school, an equivalent of European style. The graduates of this school filled the human resources of Azerbaijan first woman-teachers. Certainly, many of them continued on studying after graduating the school – they became doctors, economists, librarians, scientists. I know artists, assistant professors, even professors who once were the graduates of this school. Many of the pupils were from Shusha and Tiflis” (Heyat, 2002, pp.69-70). In 1913 the school transmuted into teachers’ seminary for Muslim women.

After Baku, schools for Muslim girls opened in different parts of Russian Empire – Tiflis, Kazan, Bashkiria and Dagestan.

Muslim Women in Georgia: Restriction or Support for Education(1882-1906)

Even in 1882 year, a conversation started to launch closed-type school of Muslim women in Tiflis. A special appeal to the highest executive body of the Russian Empire - Council of Ministers was sent for further consideration. The Council of Ministers stated, "Establishing a special school for Muslim girls in Caucasus may promote a gradually rapprochement of Caucasian Muslims and local Christian dwellers" and studying Russian language as well. Though there was underlined in a committee magazine that these kinds of schools in the Caucasus region are inaugurated with the public and private means and if local Muslims in Tiflis earn at least a part of essential resources (due to donation) for financing this school, then the government will support not only morally (the final development of the regulations, ensuring with the curriculum and necessary academic personnel), but materially (the government would apportion a distinct sum as a subsidy for maintenance this school) also. But this solicitation has not been satisfied apparently during 12 years (Guniava,2013, pp.418-422; Collection of Management Orders of Caucasian Educational District, 1897, pp.701-705).

In 1882 I. Gasprinski (one of the first Muslim erudite in Russian Empire, who analyzed the necessity of education, cultural reforms and modernization for Muslim people) in a newspaper "Tercüman" (experimental edition) published an article "Is it necessary to educate women?" that became a program work in the issue of women education. The author wrote about the ability of opening a school for Muslim women in Tiflis, "Where girls were taught different subjects and needlework. The teachers would be only women and not any man could cross the doorstep". I. Gasprinski disputes with the readers, who thought that education it is not necessary for a woman (Dinikova, 2013,p.131).

On July 31, 1895, the Trustee of Caucasian Education District (K.P.Yanovski) addressed to the Vicegerent of civil part of the Caucasus with the solicitation. There was stated at Tiflis closed school of Muslim women, along with Shari'a (Islamic law), it is planned to teach following disciplines: Russian language, history and geography of Russia, arithmetic. In outline of women progymnasium courses would be taught drawing, drafting and needlework. There was a special request in the letter - Vicegerent of civil part of the Caucasus ought to proper directions, such as: appeal to wealthy Muslims of Transcaucasia for donation; Discuss the subject for keeping the school with the help of waqf sums; Organizing committees for collecting the donations in Tiflis, Baku, Elizavetpol, Erivan (present-day Yerevan) and other cities (Guniava,2013, pp.416-420).

On November 27, 1895 and On January 13, 1896 Transcaucasian Mufti (Chairman of the Transcaucasian Sunni Muslim Religious Board) Hussein Efendi Gaibov and Sheikh ul-Islam Akhund Ahmed Husein-zadeh (Chairman of the Shia Religious Board) asked the wealthy Muslims of Governorate (Gubernia) for an aid. In Sheikh-ul-Islam Circular for Transcaucasia Shia Majlises (assemblies) is noted the inevitability of 50000 rubles for the construction of the school for Muslim girls and 15000 rubles for covering the current expenses. Preserving of Sharia norms and Muslim society traditions at the school of Muslim girls was underlined. The director of the school and

the teachers of Russian disciplines should be educated and worthy Muslim women. However, if such teachers were not able to find, women of another nationality would occupy these positions who are well educated and seized Azerbaijani language until this school has precious graduates. The Islamic theology (Sunni and Shia) ought to be taught by Muslim women and if there were a lack of them, then there would be invited elderly representatives of Muslim priesthood with particular devotion and high moral values [Guniava,2013, pp.425-428; Hacilar,2012,p.85]. Though, it is clear from the archives that collecting donations was a complicated and contradictory process.

In 1895 there were 15 two-class, 14 one-class schools for girls and nearly 150 mixed schools in the South Caucasus. There were 4700 girls studying at these schools (Guniava,2013, p.417).

On June 10, 1905 a Caucasian governor I. Vorontsov-dashkov met representatives of Muslim people in Tbilisi living in Elizavetpol, Baku Governorate, the Borchali uyezd (district) of Tiflis Governorate, as well provinces (oblasts) of Dagestan and Batumi. He considered presented requests in petition righteously and promised that he would pay a precise attention to the opening of schools in native language, establishing education institutions for Muslims and women, assisting publishing of newspapers, magazines and books in native language. On August 5, 1905 Caucasian governor declared: "I acquainted with the national education situation and I think it is inevitable to lead all education disciplines in native language for the pupils at the elementary school. At the one-class schools it is necessary to prolong studying for 4 years instead of 3 years; Starting learning Russian language with the help of oral speaking and native language from the second half of the first academic year (previously, it was learning from first half of the first year). Starting learning of Russian grammar from the first half of the second academic year and positions of the teachers ought to be occupied by only those persons who possess native language [of pupils]" (Documents and letters from the private archives of A. M. Topchibashi and J. Gajibeili,2012, pp.11-14; Seidzade,1991,p.15).

On March 3, 1906 in Tiflis, at St. Nino School was an opening of Muslim chapel and separate class, where 50 Muslim pupils were taught theology and native language. Y.A. Vorontsova-Dashkova -the wife of Tiflis governor – Baron A.A. Raush Von Trautenberg, built it with her own expenses (Hacilar,2012,p.86).

On April 14, 1906, the magazine "Tiflis Listok" was acquainting that the scathing problem of Muslim people in Transcaucasia was a national education, namely opening schools for Muslim girls. According to the report of trustee of Caucasus Education District, regarding opening a school for Muslim women in Tiflis by the means of the state, I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, Caucasus governor, considered impossible to satisfy Muslim people demands at that time. However, under the guidance of L.G. Lopatinski – an assistant of Trustee of Caucasus Education District was established a special commission for financing resources. This commission ought to project a school for Muslim women (with a boarding school) and estimation. Besides, it had to find sources for its building and preserving. The Vicegerent approved the commission with the following staff: Transcaucasian Mufti – Hussein Efendi Gaibov, Transcaucasian Sheikh-ul-Islam – Abdussalam Akhundzadeh, bureaucrat of special prescription to

Vicegerent – Aseldar Bey Kazanalipov; Alaiar Bey Zulgardarov; translator of Caucasus Military District headquarter – Mirza-sherif Mirzaev; chairman of Muslim charitable organization in Tiflis lieutenant colonel Ibrahim Pasha Aga Vekilov; police lieutenant Nadir Bey Yadigarov; Trustee of Muslim schools in Tiflis Ibrahim Bey Teregulov; Mrs. Zarin-Taj Begum Alikhanova (a daughter of Major-general Kelbali Khan Nakhichevanski – N.G.) - a wife of general- governor of Kutaisi, Major-general Maksud Alikhanov-Avarski; Nisa Khanum (Khansha) Gapari Ibragimbekova, a widow Mrs Hamida Dovatorova, inspector of women institute in Transcaucasia P.E. Melger and a director of Caucasus museum A.N. Koznakov (Owing to the opening women education institution,1906; Hacilar, 2012, p.85).

First Schools of Muslim Women in Georgia (1906-1912)

Later E.D. Aspisova did her bit in opening first school of Muslim girls in Tiflis. She asked director of national schools in Tiflis Governorate to permit her launching a private school for Muslim girls in Tiflis and since 1906-1907 the first school of Muslim women in Tiflis was established in the police 6th division (Vorontsov str., Ibragimov house). On November 19, 1906 was held a “school sanctify”, where various representatives of the society were invited to attend [News,1906; School for Muslim women,1906]. An Azerbaijanian Maecenas G.Z. Taghiyev was also invited to the opening ceremony, but due to his illness, he was unable to attend. Although, he sent a greeting card and 25.000 rubles (Suleymanov,2010).

Girls with the age from 7 to 12 years were accepted at the school. An annual tuition fee was 60 rubles. The following subjects were taught at the school: Russian and Azerbaijani (Azeri Turkish) languages (Azerbaijani language was taught by Kohar Khanum Gaibova here), arithmetic, calligraphy, needlework and Sharia. Initially 15 pupils were accepted, five of them exempted from the tuition fee. The reason of small quantity of pupils was a high tuition fee (Hacilar, 2012, p.88).

The school owned a scanty material base. From 1905 in Tiflis newspapers (“Novoe Obozrenie”, “Kavkaz”) opened Muslim sections and in papers were regularly publishing letters of famous Azerbaijanian progressists receiving education in Russia (E. Sultanov, H. Minasazov, S. Mehmandarov), they introduced Muslim people problems to Russian speaking readers. H. Minasazov discussed an emancipation of the women as an actual social problem. H. Minasazov and others addressed to the board of the city by the means of the papers to render assistance to the school materially (History of public-cultural reformisms In Caucasus and Central Asia (XIX – early XX centuries), 2012, p.181). On December 2, 1906, the founder of Muslim women school in Tiflis E.D. Aspisova asked municipal government to intercede with the city council to establish some scholarships [Mohammedan School,1906, p.2). Lately on February 8, 1907, “a commission of Tiflis schools discussed solicitation of Mrs. Aspirova (Aspisova – N.G.) founder of Muslim women school, to render an annual assistance. The commission ascertained to ask a council to postpone 500 rubles annually for this school” (Commission of Tiflis city schools,1907, p.3). On May 7, 1907, at the meeting of Tbilisi city council discussed “settling of amount to Muslim school of E.D Aspisova and the council granted the school 500 rubles” (Board of

council,1907). However, actually city administration did nothing for the school assisting. Subsequently the school of E.D. Aspisova suppressed after 3 years from opening (Hacilar, 2012, p.88).

The second school of the same kind for Muslim girls was opened in 1910. Approximately 70 girls were studying at this school. The tuition fee was not so high and learning period defined for three years. The subjects taught at school were Sharia, Russian and Azerbaijani (Azeri Turkish) languages, arithmetic, needlework (Hacilar,2012,pp.88-89). An honorable attorney of the school became oil manufacturer and Maecenas from Baku Ajar Bek Ashurbekov. On April 29, 1909 Ashurbekov appealed to the trustee of the Caucasian Education District with a request: "As I have found out, a school for Muslim women is opening in Tiflis, I have nobility to ask your Excellency humbly to appoint me as a honored trustee of this school. Herewith I will deposit an appropriate sum in amount of 400 rubles smartly, if the named institution would be a state educational institution". As a final point, after the bureaucratic correspondence, in 1910 he became an honored trustee of Tiflis school for Muslim women. Although, in 1912 the school closed down due to the lack of suitable means (Ashurbeili,1993).

Conclusion

- A civil education idea (conception) of Muslim girls was immensely significant in Transcaucasia and in Georgia as well, but its practical realization took lots of efforts and years (time).
- The mite of Azerbaijanian Maecenas is enormous not only in establishing of first civil Russian-Muslim school of girls in Baku, but in functioning of similar schools in Tiflis.
- The foundation history of schools of Muslim girls in Tiflis to some extent testifies an endeavor of Muslim elite to shelter the interests of their society particularly in educational issues.
- It should be noted that after closing private schools of Muslim girls in Tiflis, there were not any other schools where Muslim girls were able to receive an education. Although the above-mentioned educational institutions were functioning during a short space of time, but they played a huge role in education and upbringing of Muslim girls and generally in rousing interest for the education.

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