

By Narmin BAGIROVA

“SAADET”

Charity – a unique educational experience

Agha Akhundov, teacher of French in schools of “Saadet” society

The 1905 revolution in Russia was followed by the October declaration of the government, which triggered the expansion of cultural and educational work throughout the country. Issues of education and enlightenment took an important place in the media, including the outskirts of the empire, where primary attention was paid to the issues of education in the native language and improving the quality of the educational process.

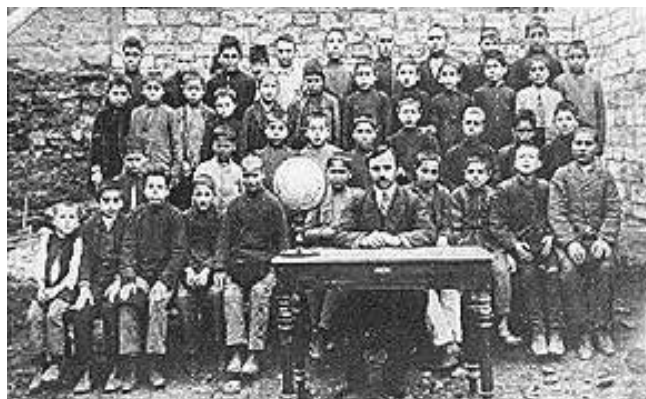
At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, as the movement for national enlightenment grew stronger, charities started to appear in different cities and districts of the South Caucasus on the initiative and with the active participation of advanced, patriotic-minded representatives of national intelligentsia (representatives of the educated segment of the population enjoying popular respect). Having long-standing traditions among Azerbaijani people, charity assumed large proportions by the end of the 19th century, acquiring new forms and content in accordance with social and economic relations brought about by the rapid development of industrial capitalism. The start of industrial oil production led to profound changes in public relations and the whole way of life, accelerated social and property stratification, which paved the way for social contradictions characteristic of the initial stage of capitalism. The overwhelming majority of the people had to struggle with need, while only a few were exorbitantly enriched and wallowed in luxury.

Among the charities that appeared during this period with the aim of promoting public education was “Saadet” society, which was officially registered on June



7, 1907. The foundations of the society had been laid a year earlier, when a group of enlightened representatives of the clergy decided to build a madrasah, and having accomplished this task, set a goal to repair Baku's Tazapir madrasah. However, there were a number of difficulties in achieving this goal, so they decided to establish a charity. For this purpose, the charter was drafted, and its Article 1 stated that the society aims to reorganize madrasahs and other religious educational institutions operating in Baku on the basis of new principles. At the same time, the new society aimed to open religious, pedagogical and other higher educational institutions meeting the requirements of the time. A month after its registration, the founding meeting of the society was held at the Gasim bey mosque in Baku, where prominent scholars and theologians of the time were elected its leaders: Mullah Alakber Abbasguluza-deh was elected chairman and Mullah Agha Aghaal-izadeh was elected deputy chairman. The 14 members of the board also included well-known representatives of the Muslim clergy, as well as prominent intellectuals and some wealthy persons, such as Murtuza Mukhtarov. There were 24 honorary, 98 full and 122 active members in the ranks of the society. In general, it was the emphasis on the development of religious education that

Group of teachers and students of "Madrasah-Saadet" school. Music teacher Uzeyir Hajibayov in the center



Building of "Saadet" society in Baku built in 1912

Group of students and pupils of the society



distinguished “Saadet” from other charitable societies (3, pp. 232-233).

This fact actually served as a basis for criticism of the society by some enlighteners and democrats who reproached “Saadet” for increasing the ranks of the clergy and thus contributing to the spread of clericalism. In particular, in 1908, the well-known satirical magazine “Molla-Nasreddin” published an article entitled “Eight Hundred Mullahs”, which was an expression of this position (3, p. 341).

One of the most important events in the history of the society was the opening of the educational institution “Madrasah-Saadet” (translated as “school of happiness”) in 1907. The director of this madrasah, Mirza Alakbar-khan Bahman, a graduate of the Sorbonne, a highly educated man who spoke several languages. Together with the director, seven teachers worked here in the 1908-1909 academic year, and later the number rose to 14. This madrasah had a strong teaching staff: Turkish and German languages, as well as history, were taught by prominent Azerbaijani publisher, public and politi-

cal figure Ali Huseynzadeh, the native language, geography and arithmetic by Farhad Agazadeh, and Sharia law by Mullah Abdurrahim Hadizadeh. Along with this, in 1908-1911, arithmetic, Russian language and singing were taught by prominent publisher, public figure and great Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibayov, who has contributed a great deal to improving the madrasah’s curriculum. Besides, such prominent representatives of Azerbaijani intelligentsia and public figures as Jeyhun-bey Hajibayov, Ali Teregulov and Musa Rza Asgarli worked here at different times.

From the first days of operation, the madrasah gained considerable popularity. This was largely possible thanks to the abovementioned Ali Huseynzadeh, who was appointed director of the school soon after Mirza Alakbar Bahman left for diplomatic work and worked in this post until departure to Istanbul on December 4, 1910. In general, the system of education in the madrasah was strict and objective. At the end of each academic year, students passed written and oral examinations and were transferred to the next depart-

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ment depending on the results. All students wore a uniform, which consisted of a tunic with the name of the school inscribed on a blue stripe, yellow buttons one on each sleeve and a headdress with a special sign. The school had three preparatory and four main classes, providing primary and incomplete secondary education. Its graduates had the right to continue their studies in gymnasium or real school. The curriculum of the madrasah was based on the Ottoman system of education and provided for the study of the basics of Islam, Turkish (native) language and numeracy in the first year of the preparatory department. It is noteworthy that 10 out of 18 hours per week were devoted to the study of the native language. In the second and third years, the program included teaching of the Koran, Persian and Russian languages, and later the Arabic language,



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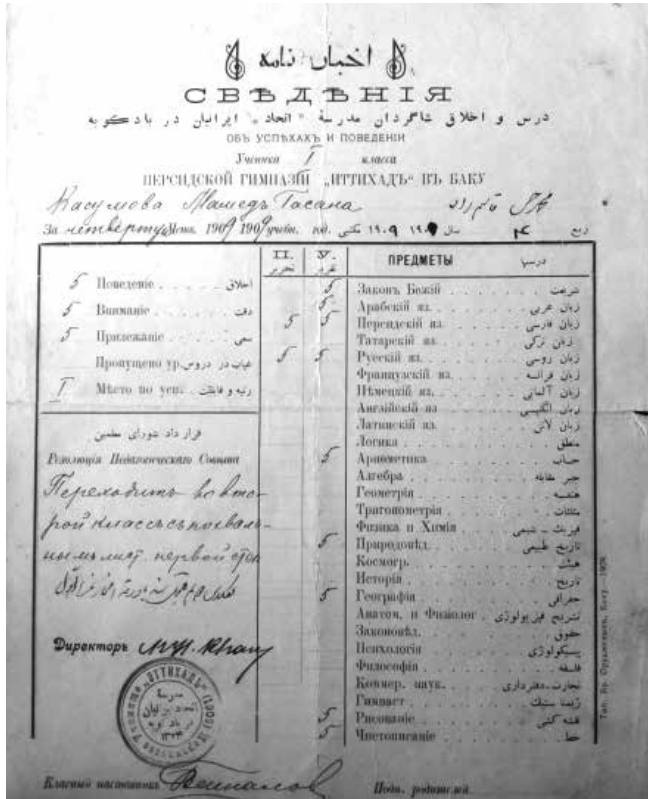


numeracy, Muslim and Russian spelling, drawing and carving. Then came the first year of the main education, during which pupils, in addition to Sharia, numeracy, drawing, Turkish, Persian and Russian languages, studied subjects such as German, history, natural history, geography, history of Russia, in the second grade French, and in the third and fourth grades ancient history, mathematics and geometry. As we can see, the curriculum of madrasahs paid a lot of attention to secular disciplines, including several foreign languages - an important condition for full-fledged education. In addition, there were evening courses at the madrasah, which played a great role in spreading literacy among the people.

It should be noted that teaching at "Saadet Madrasah" and other educational institutions of the society was conducted mainly with textbooks and teaching aids delivered from Istanbul and Tabriz. This, of course, could not but attract the attention of the authorities, who used any occasion to inspect the educational institutions of "Saadet" charity, demanding exhaustive information about curricula and programs, identities of teachers, authors of textbooks, etc.

In 1906, "Saadet" society opened a seven-year Russian-Persian men's gymnasium "Ittihad" in Baku for children

Certificate of "Ittihad" gymnasium graduate Mammad Hasan Gasimzadeh



of Iranians who came to the city to work. A total of 180 children went to this school, which was located in Shahidanov's house in Sadovaya Street (now Niyazi) (4, p. 341) and was intended for children aged 8-17 (4, p. 341). The National Museum of History of Azerbaijan keeps materials about the French teacher of the "Ittihad" gymnasium, prominent engineer Agha Akhundov, a graduate of the University of Liege (2), as well as doctor of the gymnasium Bahram-bey Akhundov (2). Some other teachers of the gymnasium include the teacher of Russian language, Ivan Alekseyevich Motorin, teacher of numeracy Khudadat-bey Azizbayov, teacher of history and geography Gasim Gasymov, teacher of German Aghalar-bey Mahmudbayov, teacher of Arabic Mirza Mahmud-khan, teacher of Farsi Asadulla Aliyev, teacher of Turkish Seyidali Mehdiyev. The program of the gymnasium allocated six hours a week to teaching Russian, four hours to French, three hours to Arabic and German in the third grade, and two hours each to Sharia, numeracy, geometry, geography, history and natural history. In addition, great importance was attached to the teaching of humanities such as history and literature, as well as Latin and Greek. Pupils of the second and third grades of "Ittihad" wore a uniform in the form of a green

cloth jacket with a standing collar, cloth pants and a cap with a metal plate and an image of a lion and the sun and the "Madrasah Ittihad" inscription. Students of the first and fourth grades wore a jacket and a shirt of gray cloth with silver buttons. Students of the fifth and senior grades wore hats with white stripes and a silver plate in the middle. Graduates of the gymnasium were allowed to visit their native school in a black suit with a tie.

In contrast to the Baku gymnasium, the "Ittifaq" madrasah opened by the society in Tiflis operated under special supervision. It should be noted that a significant part of its students were capable children from poor families, whose tuition fees were paid by the society. According to the reports on the activities of "Saadet", in the first school year of 1907-1908, 46 out of 126 students of the school studied at the expense of the society, in 1908-1909 a total of 108 out of 132, and in 1909-1910 - 200 out of 300. As the premises rented for the school turned out to be cramped, in 1910 the leaders of the society decided to build a separate building, and the development of the project was entrusted to well-known Azerbaijani architect Ziver-bey Ahmadbayov. However, when the builders had finished the first floor, World War I broke out, and on the order of the government, the roof was hastily rebuilt and a military hospital was set up in the unfinished building. As a result, the madrasah had to remain in its former premises.

In addition to the above, "Saadet" society opened a library in Baku, and its funds were replenished in the order of charity: intellectuals organized campaigns of book donation. As a result, in a short time the library received a large amount of literature in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Russian languages.

As it follows from the above, the "Saadet" charity, established during the rise of democratic and enlightenment movement in Azerbaijan, made a worthy contribution to the dissemination of advanced education and the rise of culture among the Azerbaijani people. ❀

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