

## The sources of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan

Zeynab Aliyeva Mahammadali \*

*Post-graduate of Philosophical department, BSU, Baku, Azerbaijan*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to explain the sources of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan like geographical location, ethnic minorities (Mountain Jews, Tats, Talysh, Kurds, Molokans, Ingiloys, Tsakhurs, Avars, Lezgins, Khynalygs, Buduqlus, and Gysz) and religion (Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam). Each of these factors variously affected and enriched Azerbaijan culture. Today, Azerbaijan as multicultural state provides the best opportunities for various culture followers and also subculture members realizing their values and beliefs.

**Key words:** *Ethnocentrism; Cultural relativism; The silk road; Ethnic diversity; Zoroastrianism; Calligraphies*

### 1. Introduction

In spite of fact that all humans share a basic genetic similarity, people are not the same. Individuals differ each other in height, weight, skin color, facial features, hair texture and other physical characteristics. There are some sources of variation in human populations. One of these important sources is culture that appears as acquisition of different cultural beliefs and practices. When these various cultures members live in one state as result of integration appears new and wealthier type of culture.

Cultural diversity and integration are essential factor in society and play important role in nation's life. That is why, throughout history, various researches have expressed an interest in these sector. Whenever different societies have come into contact with one another, people have compared and contrasted the various behaviors in their respective cultural traditions. One of the first Western historians, Herodotus wrote about different forms of behavior and belief in one society but these kinds of writings on diversity in cultures were often based on ethnocentric attitudes. Ethnocentrism is the judging another society by the values and standards of your own society so ethnocentrism is universal phenomenon. As humans learn the basic values, beliefs and norms of their society they tend to think of their own culture as the most preferable, while other cultures they accept as less desirable. Unfortunately, this point of view lasted twenties century and anthropologists recognized that ethnocentrism stave off ethnographers that viewing other cultures in a scientific manner. So researches developed cultural relativism which means no cultural traditions are inherently superior or inferior. Because cultural traditions represent unique adaptations and symbolic systems for

different societies, these traditions must be viewed as equally valid. This means investigating other societies without imposing ethnocentric assumptions and also this standpoint allows different nations with different cultural beliefs to live together in one state.

Azerbaijan can be excellent example where this theory realize itself because with tolerant attitude toward new cultures and their acceptance make Azerbaijan one of the multicultural state from ancient times. The contemporary Azerbaijan located on the border of European and Asian continents, the coast of Caspian Sea. Later, all historical processes shoved that its suitable geographical location one of the factors that facilitated this process.

We can say Azerbaijan become the center of cultural diversity since it was part of The Silk Road, or Silk Route which was a series of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East by linking traders, merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads, and urban dwellers from China and India to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods of time. It served as the "gate" between mysterious faraway China and rich Europe and being part of this The Silk Road not only attracted here various people with different cultural background but also was one of causes to build places for merchants. Especially, during the reign of Shah Abbas I, as he tried to upgrade the Silk route to improve the commercial prosperity of the Empire, an abundance of caravanserais, bridges, bazaars and roads were built and this strategy was followed by wealthy merchants who also profited from the increase in trade. Today, these tangible cultural patterns prove and enrich Azerbaijan cultural heritage.

Another important factor that enriched Azerbaijan culture is various ethnic groups that live Azerbaijan territory. The historical sources always

\* Corresponding Author.

showed that the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan was expanded. Today, Azerbaijan is distinguished with ethnic diversity. Besides Azerbaijani Turks, Mountain Jews, Tats, Talysh, Kurds, Molokans, Ingiloys, Tsakhurs, Avars, Lezgins, Khynalyqs, Buduqlus, Grysz and other ethnic groups live in its territory. The representatives of ethnic groups consider themselves as Azerbaijanis but each group has retained distinctive elements of their different culture. This culture is reflected in domestic life, crafts, in kitchen and various ceremonies.

One of the most ancient peoples living in Azerbaijan is the Jews that presently live in Baku, Sumgayit, Guba, Oguz and Goychay regions. Especially, Red settlement in Guba region is considered the most densely populated area of mountain Jews. Historically Judaism was represented in Azerbaijan by Mountain Jews. Moisey of Kalankat relates the arrival of Jews in the Caucasus Mountain in I century BC. According to one opinion, one of the oldest Jewish communities, Mountain Jews are sons of Israel withdrawn from Philistine by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings and then settled in Midia. So while being in Midia they mixed with tats. Under this influence the Mountain Jews speak in Tat language, which is a dialect of mixture of the ancient Persian dialect, arami and Jewish words.

Other ethnic minority group Azerbaijan is Talyshes- the people living in the south-east of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Lankaran, Astara, Masalli and Lerik regions, as well as in the north of Iran. They speak in the Talysh language belonging to the family of Iranian languages. Former Soviet scientists considered the Talysh as local population. Thus, they considered them as generation of most ancient local tribes of Azerbaijan, kadusi. However, Western scholars have doubtful approach to it. In their opinion, the arrival of the Talyshs in Azerbaijan (XIII century) connected with the warlord of Genghis Khan with Talysh name. Talyshs' material and spiritual culture does not differ from the population of Azerbaijan so far.

## **2. Ethnic minorities**

### **2.1. Kurds**

Presently they live in the regional center of Sadarak of Nakhchivan AR, in the Teyvaz village of Julfa and Sharur region, as well as before the Armenian occupation they lived in Lachin (Garakechdi, Minkend, Chiragly villages), in Kelbajar (Agjakend, Zar villages in full and in other rural villages in mixed environment), in Gubadly (Zilanly village) region. Kurds speak in Kurd language belonging to Iranian languages.

### **2.2. Tats**

The people with small number live in Guba, Khyzy and Khasmaz region of Azerbaijan and in

some villages of Baku. According to some researchers, tats are ancestors of ancient Persians resettled here along the western coast of Caspian Sea from Apsheron to Derbent, and they no doubt are the most ancient ethnic layers of the territory of Shirvan.

### **2.3. Avars**

They are one of ethnic minorities living in the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Zagatala and Balakan regions. They speak in Avar language, belonging to the family of the North Caucasus languages and today they mixed with Azerbaijanis much. At present, they live in a compact settlements together with Azerbaijanis in Gabaqchol settlement of Balakan region, Jar, Zilban, Mazykh, Beretbina, Jinjartala, Katekh, Meshasambul, Mahamalar, Goyatala villages.

### **2.4. The khynalyqs**

This ethnic group have unique features among the aboriginal ethnic minority peoples of Azerbaijan. This ethnicity belongs to Caucasian language family, and in historical and ethnographic literature for their settlement around Shahdag is called as "Shahdag peoples". The khynalyqs are Azerbaijan's most ancient inhabitants. This ethnicity has the only language and the settlement in the world. In other words, in the ethnic map of the world, there is the only village of Khynalyq and khynalyq language, which exist in Guba region of Azerbaijan. Today this territory was declared natural reserves and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan.

### **2.5. Buduqlus**

National ethnic representatives of Azerbaijan distinguished as Shahdag national ethnic group. The first official document related to buduqlu issued by the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas in 1607. Buduqlu historically were divided in generations, small and big family communities, and now known by the name of the same generation. As other mountainous population, buduqlus used to have a sedentary lifestyle.

### **2.6. Lezgins**

One of the Caucasian peoples, live in Dagestan and Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan they mainly live compactly in Guba, Khachmaz regions, as well as in Baku, Ganja, Sumgait and Mingechevir, Gabala, Ismayilli, Oghuz, Goychay cities. The Lezgins constitutes 2.2% of the population of Azerbaijan.

### **2.7. Molokans**

Currently molokans live in Baku, Sumgait, Shamakhi, Ismayilli, Gadabey and Guba regions of the Azerbaijan. The first molokans communities appeared in Azerbaijan in the middle of the XVIII

century. So they were exiled here from Russia for acting against the Orthodox Church. At present in popular Ismayilli region, in Ivanovka village of Azerbaijan the followers of molokans came to these places from Russia and now they continue to live there.

## 2.8. Ingiloyls

Mainly live in the territory of Gakh and Zagatala regions of Azerbaijan. During Shah Abbas I they adopted Islam and Mainly Moslems and small part of Christians from this group speak the south dialect of Georgian language. The main engagement of ingiloyls living in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains is tobacco growing, wheat growing, grape, nuts and fruits growing and cattle breeding.

## 2.9. Roma (gypsies)

One of the nomadic peoples. They are of Indo-European origin. Roma can be found in all of Eurasian. In Azerbaijan gypsies were resettled in Balakan area during Shah Abbas I to prevent revolts of local tribes. Mainly they live in Shambulbina, Guluzanbina, Melikzada villages. In Balakend the Roma are speaking in Farsi. In addition, the Roma live in Shamakhi, Yevlakh regions and Borchali. They historically lived the nomadic life-style. Traditionally they engaged in horse breeding and cattle breeding, but also used to have a blacksmith job.

## 2.10. Assyrians

They are one of the ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan too. Their roots linked with Assyrians lived in ancient Iran and Turkey. At present, they settled as small ethnic group Zagatala zone.

## 2.11. Udis

They are one of aboriginal native nations of Azerbaijan. The ethnicity inhabited in Uti province of the ancient Caucasian Albania, and in the nineteenth century in several residential villages of Nuha (present-day Sheki region) region. In modern period they live in Nij village of Gabala region and partly in the center of the Oguz region. Udi ethnicity only lives in the territory of Azerbaijan according to map of the world's ethnicities. Udis are ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus and belong to the lezgin subgroup off the Caucasian language family who managed to preserve many of the ancient elements. Historically, worshipping to the Sun and Moon Udis had accepted Christianity in the beginning of the fourth century and preserved it to the present days.

All these ethnographic minorities have different religions, different thoughts about values and morality. All cultures change during the years but different aspects of culture changes at different rates and some aspects of culture can be remarkable stable over long periods of time. We can say culture

is the mix of old and new. These ethnic groups have brought various cultural values to Azerbaijan culture and this effect was different in past and now. What is new coming from other cultures rich dominant culture and as the result of interaction this dominant culture lost something too.

Azerbaijan nation's genetic memory that covers itself the three religions - Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam's values and this have always had great effect on shaping intercultural communication both in cross country and in the international arena. Zoroastrianism in Azerbaijan goes back to the first millennium BC or earlier and was the predominant religion of Greater Iran before the conversion to Islam. Today the religion, culture and traditions of Zoroastrianism remains highly respected in Azerbaijan, and Nowruz that considered beginning of the year continues to be the main holiday in the country. Zoroastrianism has left a deep mark in history and culture of Azerbaijan. The Baku Ateshgah or Fire Temple was a Zoroastrians' fire worship place and today considered one of tangible cultural patterns that express the traces of the Zoroastrianism.

Another source of Azerbaijan culture is Islamic religion and its ideological trends. One of the world's major religions, such as Islam had a crucial role in the evolution of Azerbaijan culture. Islam was combined the peoples of the Near and Middle East in common culture. The Arab conquest and the long-term structure of the Caliphate was the main reason for the changes in the cultural life of Azerbaijan. This change manifests itself primarily to religious views and then fundamentally influenced the course of the cultural process. A new religion - Islam gradually adopted and then Azerbaijan culture were integrated into Islamic cultural system, there was a break in the development of the Turkish language.

Between the 9th and 10th centuries, Arab authors continued to refer to the region between the Kura and Aras rivers as Arran. During this time, Arabs from Basra and Kufa came to Aran and seized lands that the indigenous peoples had abandoned and Arabs became land-owning elite. Despite pockets of continued resistance, the majority of the inhabitants of Azerbaijan converted to Islam. This occupation and then widespread of Islam in Azerbaijan territory had so great influence to our culture and education that sometimes researchers distribute Azerbaijan cultural history into two periods: the period that covers before Islamic and after Islam.

The immense universities, observatories, hospitals, pharmacies, and libraries situated in the Muslim East also in Azerbaijan. For propagating Islamic religion Arabians opened Madrasa which was the name of the secondary and higher education institutions in Muslim countries. The madrasas that look like universities and also taught subjects like Greek philosophy, astrology, logic, oratory science, geometry, medicine. Here educated landlord's and clergies' children. In XI century in Shamakhi Malaham settlement established madrasa that called

"Malaham" madrasa which was one of the famous education and teaching centre. Manager of this madrasa was Umar ibn Osman one of the prominent scholars and doctors of twelfth century. In spite of all benefits of madrasas there were not clear education programme but all education process was in unique Arabian language.

So, this language was legal language of empire and that is why all education process was in Arabian language. Thus, Arabian language played important role in the life of Azerbaijan cultural as well as the role of Latin language in Western Europe. (Namiq Abbas, 2012) Students learned here Arabic and Farsi languages, Arabic grammar, logic, kalam, Fiqh (Islamic law), mathematics, calligraphy, history and literature. About until the eleventh century, the Arabic language turned to the main vehicle of scientific, religious and literary creativity and objective actors like lack of the common language and the alphabet created favorable condition. All clerical process began to lead in Arabic language and after one or two centuries this language gradually turned from invader's language to cultural indicator. Without exaggeration we can say that, Islamic world was in the summit in mankind's civilization around X-XIV centuries.

Another Middle Ages cultural pattern was calligraphies and miniature paintings that draw attention of Azerbaijan cultural life. In Azerbaijan calligraphers created writing samples basis of Arabic script and with this they achieved success in improving the graphics. XV centuries in the place libraries of Shirvanshahs, Ak Koyunlu and Kara Koyunlu published scientific, artistic, philosophical, religious, historical content works and drawn miniatures to these manuscript. Most of the famous Azerbaijan calligraphers lived in Tabriz which was one of Azerbaijan cities and this has proven that Tabriz is not only Arabic Empire's calligraphy center but also the calligraphy center of the Islamic East. According to historical facts, in the place of Uzun Hasan worked about 58 master calligraphers and musicians. Some of Azerbaijan calligraphers like M. Tabrizi, Tabrizi Mirabdulla, Yagubi Suleiman Ali, Abd Al-Yagubi operated in the place of different Eastern countries and affected to the development of calligraphy. For example, a calligrapher M. Tabrizi was known as the founder of "nastaliq" line. Jafar Tabrizi headed to Ak Koyunlu Baysunqur's palace library for a long time and he copied Ferdowsi's "Shahnama" (1430), Saadi "Gulistan" s (1427), Nizami's "Khamsa" which considered the perfect example of calligraphy. It copies stored in libraries and museums of Paris, Dublin, Tehran, Istanbul, St. Petersburg.

In this period libraries were not just the place where books are protected. At the same the libraries were workshops where books were skillfully prepared. Library named "Dar-ul-kitab" was in Ganja in XII century. The most precious manuscripts of many Middle Eastern countries were existed in this library. One of the famous medieval palace libraries was "Seyyidana" which operational in the 90s of XX

century in Qazvin. "Seyyidanə" library had readers not only Azerbaijan but also in foreign countries. When Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was arrested in Alamut caste worked in this library and was this library's director in thirties of XIII.

In the later of the sixteenth century the role and position of Islam was a very strong. The Safavids came to power with a strong influence of religious ideology and a secular state and its power were source came from the incorporation of religious and secular authorities. The Safavid dynasty in all its activities was based on the Islamic religion. We can imagine this period like that: "In XVI century Azerbaijanis were as the nation Turkish, as religion was in the Islamic religion, as the culture they lived in a typical Eastern state."

The main education centers in the sixteenth century were religious institutions (mosques) too. Regarding mosques as religious propaganda center of the Middle Ages was the result of a non-scientific ideas. Mosques were not the only place of worship at the same time, there were public meetings place. Treasury of state kept there, teachers read the reports and judicial and public works were carried out.

The functional significance of the mosques, as well as their usage as cultural and educational center in the Islamic East also in Azerbaijan has attracted attention of different European travelers, merchants and diplomats. Most of them wrote in their recordings and writings about the number of mosques and their role in culture and education. Towards the end of the sixteenth century only in Tabriz was about 47 madrasas (Moslem religious school) and 600 schools. The scholars of the sixteenth century got information about East and Greek culture through the Arabian language and then they inherit all obtained knowledge to students.

The main directions in the development of the architecture of the sixteenth century were the construction of religious and memorial complexes. Principal place among building belong to the mosque. Under Shariat doctrines the new mosques were built upon the foundation of many of destroyed mosque and madrasa and combining mosque and madrasa as one complex special characteristic feature. in Azerbaijan in XVI century. The best example of this is famous Shirvanshahs' Palace (XV century) which included World heritage list in 2000 by UNESCO with Inner city and Maiden tower. Educational opportunities in the madrasa attracted the attention of foreign travelers. Ottoman diplomat and traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) was in Azerbaijan in the years of 1646-1648 and wrote about the educational potential of Tabriz. (Featherstone, 1990)

In the beginning of XIX century political and social changes that happened Azerbaijan enormously affected directly social composition of the population. For instance, during thirty years of XIX century The Russian empire moved a numerous of its population especially sectarians to some territories of Azerbaijan. In addition to this, in 1817

the Germans moved Caucasian region and Russian empire used this condition and resettled and built two colonies in Northern of Azerbaijan for them. One of them called Yelenendorf in Khanlar region and second one was Annenfeld in Shamkir region. Of course all these migration process affected to Azerbaijan cultural and its style. German Lutheran Church was one of the examples of this period. Church built in XIX century today is church one of the historical symbols of Goygol.

During Peter the Great tenure, instead of "traditional Slavic identity" that dominated the Turkish-Mongol feudal hierarchy, the adoption of industrialized, capitalist "European Russian identity" and the policy of setting "Russia in European Periphery" caused to spreading Western European culture and values to the Russian colonies as well as Azerbaijan. Especially, flare of Baku as "petrol paradise" region led to dissolution of the traditional cultural and social relations and creating of new capitalist society concept. In spite of Azerbaijan culture separated from the culture of the Middle East and Anatolia Turkish identity and their Russification policy in all areas of socio-cultural life however, has entered nation-building and modernization process.

### 3. Conclusion

These cultural, social and political movements caused shifting to new European-style education instead of the traditional madrasa education and to foundation of schools, mass media, theater, trade unions, charitable organizations, libraries, new genre of literature, political parties, political and cultural ideas. The socio-cultural changes and development in nineteenth century led to transform from empire state model that based on tribal, dynasty management system to the democratic republic, nation-state model in twentieth century.

Modern Azerbaijan culture is new and integrated culture that not only combines European culture in the face of Russia and East-Islamic culture in the face of Iran but also keeps its ancients, national traditions.

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