

The literary environment of South Azerbaijan (1947–1978)

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Abstract: The history of the Azerbaijani people has been shaped by complex geopolitical shifts, particularly since the early 19th century, when the region became a focal point of Russian-Iranian relations. Following the treaties of Gulustan and Turkmenchay, Azerbaijan was divided into northern and southern territories, falling under the influence of the Russian Empire and Iran, respectively. This article specifically examines the literary environment of South Azerbaijan between 1947 and 1978. It analyzes the socio-political pressures, including the prohibition of the Azerbaijani language in press and education, and the symbolic burning of books. Despite systematic cultural repression and bans on writing in their mother tongue, South Azerbaijani writers demonstrated remarkable resilience. This research explores how patriotic themes and the quest for national identity became the central ideological pillars of the period's literature, preserving the linguistic and cultural roots of the people within the Iranian state.

Keywords: South Azerbaijan literature, literary environment, national identity, patriotic themes, linguistic repression, cultural resistance, Pahlavi era, Northern and Southern Azerbaijan

Introduction

The historical trajectory of the Azerbaijani people is characterized by a complex process of cultural resilience and significant geopolitical shifts. At the heart of this historical framework lies the 19th century confrontation between the Russian Empire and the Qajar state, which fundamentally reshaped the region's political and social destiny. The treaties of Gulustan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) did not merely redraw borders; they effectively bisected a unified cultural and linguistic entity, placing the northern territories under Russian administration while the southern lands remained within the Iranian

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sphere. This division inaugurated a century-long period of divergent yet interconnected socio-political and literary developments.

While the 19th century laid the foundations for modern Azerbaijani artistic culture, the 20th century—particularly the period between 1947 and 1978—represents a uniquely contradictory and transformative era for the South Azerbaijani literary environment. Following the collapse of the National Government in late 1946, the literary scene in the South faced unprecedented systemic pressures, including strict prohibitions on the Azerbaijani language, the closure of educational institutions, and the symbolic burning of books. Despite these repressive measures, South Azerbaijani literature evolved into a potent medium for progressive ideas, national identity, and patriotic discourse. Influenced significantly by the literary movements in Baku and Turkey, writers in the South utilized both poetry and prose to navigate the constraints of the Pahlavi regime's 'White Revolution' and chauvinistic policies. This article examines how South Azerbaijani literature functioned during these years: both as a target of political repression and as a strong protector of the people's language and culture. By examining the contributions of key figures such as Mohammad-Hosseini Shahriyar, Bulud Qarachorlu Sahand, and prominent prose writers, this study highlights how literature became the primary vehicle for preserving national consciousness in the face of forced assimilation.

Historical and literary dynamics of South Azerbaijan (1947–1978)

The history of every nation is a mirror of its destiny and one of the powerful factors that determines its future. The history of the Azerbaijani people, including their socio-political, scientific-literary, and generally cultural life, has passed through tumultuous paths. When we look at the history of the Azerbaijani state, we see that at the beginning of the 18th century, the socio-political and cultural-literary development of Azerbaijan was closely connected with Russian-Iranian relations. Of course, it is also an undeniable fact that in previous periods, the favorable geographical position and rich natural resources of Azerbaijan were one of the powerful factors influencing the formation of its socio-political life. The bloody wars between the Iranian Shah and the Russian Empire were mainly fought on the territory of Azerbaijan, which resulted in the "Gulistan" treaty of 1804-1813. According to this treaty, Iran agreed to the transfer of Dagestan, Georgia, Abkhazia, as well as the Baku, Karabakh, Ganja,

Shirvan, Sheki, Derbent, Guba, and Talysh khanates to Russia. But the southern part of Azerbaijan, along the Araz River, remained within Iran. However, Iran, which did not accept this defeat, started a new war against Russia in 1826. This war resulted in the victory of the Russian Empire in 1828 and Iran was forced to hold peace negotiations, the “Turkmenchay” treaty was concluded between the two states, and according to this treaty, the Nakhchivan and Iravan khanates were also annexed to Russia, while the southern part of Azerbaijan, along the Araz River, remained within Iran. As a result, the Azerbaijani state was divided into two, the northern part remained within Russia, and the southern part remained within Iran. Of course, the division of a state into two was a tragedy for the people. All this could not but cause fundamental changes in the socio-political, literary and cultural life of both the northern and southern parts of Azerbaijan from the first years of the century:

One of the stages of Azerbaijani artistic culture, which has a rich and centuries-old history, distinguished by its ideological and aesthetic achievements, is the 19th century. The literature of this era, which grew up as a reflection of the new historical conditions, arose and developed on the basis of the eternal traditions of the classical heritage... (Asgarli 2010, 5)

It is true that the social, cultural and literary environment in South Azerbaijan was developing in the spirit of medieval Muslim culture. The processes taking place in the literature of South Azerbaijan in the 20th century were a continuation of a general trend that had already become apparent at the end of the 19th century. Of course, the literary environment of Tabriz benefited in parallel from two sources - the literary environment of Baku and Turkey, with the share of Baku being greater. Thus, South Azerbaijan literature developed not only in form, but also in ideas and content, becoming a poetic carrier of progressive ideas. Over time, in the process of evolution of literature in content and form, the glorification of ideas related to the national existence of the people became the leading line in the emerging literary - artistic, prose and poetic examples. In particular, in the South Azerbaijan literary environment, the freedom of the individual related to his native language and national roots was brought to the fore, and patriotism constituted the leading line of ideas of the emerging works. The main goal of the works of that time was the ideas of love for the homeland, freedom, independence. At the same time, one of the other main issues

touched upon by South literature was the theme of freedom of love, which has never lost its relevance and has always remained relevant:

research once again shows that the selected topics, the progressive, democratic ideas put forward, were only combined with highly poetic, powerful artistic features that remained true to the realities of life, and a brilliant form, and therefore could become a program document for the Iranian revolutions and an example for future literature. (Nazim 2005, 230)

However, when we look at the history of South Azerbaijan in 1947-1978, we can see that this period was a contradictory one. In these years, Iran, which entered the war of the Anglo-American alliance, was promoting the slogan of the 'White Revolution'. This policy was a dream of the authorities, who supposedly wanted to modernize Iran. It was a well-known fact that at that time the laws and power depended on the will of one person. But these imaginary "reforms" were, of course, destroyed as a result of the Iranian Islamic Revolution that took place in 1978-1979.

The Iranian Shah's bloody policy, based on the West, contrasted with the chauvinistic policy carried out against the people of South Azerbaijan and the bloody policy of terror committed against the activists of the National Government that collapsed in the South on December 12, 1946.

In fact, the struggle against the activists of the government established under the leadership of S.J. Pishevari was carried out not on the basis of an analysis of real factors, but with the savage logic of medieval revenge. (Amirov 2000, 146)

This struggle was led by military men, officials, and feudal lords of both Turkish and Persian descent. Therefore, the struggle against the democratic movement of the southerners and to eliminate its consequences was of a class nature. (Kave 1991)

The schools, cultural and educational institutions, periodicals, and theaters established by the National Government in South Azerbaijan were closed. The Iranian system of administration began to return to feudal-patriarchal thinking. In Iran, bans were imposed on the publication of press organizations in the Azerbaijani language, books in the native language were burned, and even our southern compatriots were forbidden to read, write, and speak in their native language (Mikayilzade 2024, 271). However, despite all these pressures, South Azerbaijani writers continued to write and create with great determination. In the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, the attitude of

the Iranian government towards the South softened somewhat. A number of works began to be published. Among the booms were H.M. Savala's "Turkish Chants", S. Javid's two-volume "Samples of Azerbaijani Folklore", B.G. Sahan's "Word of the Instrument", S. Behrangi and B. Dehghani's "Azerbaijani Legends", A.N. Okhtay's "Işık", M. Mishovlu's "Chepik Dastani", and books by other authors.

After the democratic people's revolution flared up in Iran in the 1950s, books began to be published in the Azerbaijani language from time to time. One of such books that went from hand to hand was M. Shahriyar's poem "Salam to Heydarbaba". This poem gave a great impetus to the development of our native literature and our language in Iran. Professor E. Guliyev writes about this:

The poem "Salam to Heydarbaba" is the peak of the master's creativity and also an emblem. The poem "Salam to Heydarbaba", which is as dear and sweet as a mother's lullaby for the Azerbaijani people, is especially characteristic in Iran in terms of the affirmation of Azerbaijani literature, literary language, artistic language capabilities, and in a broader sense, its rich history and present day (Guliyev 2004, 13).

This poem consisted of two parts, was written in 1953 and was first published in Tabriz in 1954. The poem was transcribed by the famous calligrapher Tahir Khoshnevis. The Azerbaijani reader (Northern Azerbaijan) became acquainted with this poem in 1966. M.A. Rasulzadeh played a major role in the spread of the poem "Salam to Heydarbaba" in Turkey. It was published and distributed by the "Azerbaijan" magazine, the organ of the Azerbaijani association in Ankara. The author of the first study of the poem (1955) entitled "A Literary Event" was the founder of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, public figure, and writer M.A. Rasulzadeh. In his article, he writes: "Shahriyar is not influenced by any school. All the subtle moments in it and the favorite methods in his creativity are only the product of his own feelings and powerful thinking. In our opinion, there is no doubt that this extraordinary work constitutes an event in Azerbaijani literature." (Rasulzadeh 1955, 40-41)

The toponomic meanings remembered with longing in this work are generalized symbols of the components of the homeland. The longing in the poem is the longing for the homeland. M. Shahriyar's work "Salute to Heydarbaba" is a patriotic epic that glorifies deep love for the homeland and love for the homeland.

Of course, the internal conflicts that occurred during the Shah's regime and the subsequent periods led to a number of radical changes in various areas of public life in South Azerbaijan, as in all of Iran.

In South Azerbaijan, poetry has traditionally surpassed prose, and folk and village artists have preferred to convey to the reader and listener the painful problems that make them think, the fate of man and society, their joys and sorrows, through the use of poetic words. Such artists include Bulud Karachorlu Sahand ("Thinking", "Stone of Patience", "Look at my Tale", "Shallag"), Qasim Jahani ("It is snowing on Tabriz", "Hold the torch"), Karim Mashrutachi Sonmez ("Oh homeland"), Hasan Majidzadeh Savalan ("From our hands, from our tongue", "Sphar holiday"), Iqbal ("Bivable men", "To my homeland"), Kazim Khoshkhaber Abbasali ("Love of homeland"), Azim Qasim ("Sara's pain", "Song of the old man"), Majid Vahidi ("Savalan mountain"), Sahibeli Yusifi Kleiber ("I will", "Hech"), Gulamrza Sabri Tabrizi ("My homeland", "Vatan", "I have not had enough of my mother"), Çayoğlu Bahruz Dovlarabadi ("The stale hot spring"), Abdulali Mujazi Aslan ("My homeland", "I am from Shanjan", "Vatan"), Habib Farshbaf ("Savalanım", "Teacher's Heart"), and others can be cited as examples.

The poets of that period, keeping the pulse of the times, fulfilled very difficult and responsible tasks. That is, they brought new images, ideas, and meaningful means of expression to the Azerbaijani poetry. The poets professionally reflected socio-political events in prose lines and poetic verses, and at the same time, they captured the national values, ancient history, customs and traditions, and culture of the dear and native people with vivid images, bright landscapes, and the language of high poetry. Of course, the contribution of the poets of Northern Azerbaijan in this field is undeniable. New prose examples emerged on the basis of the examples of poetry in the North. Researchers of South Azerbaijan literature have admitted that: "In order to meet modern demands, prose must address diverse issues, reveal qualities that can serve social progress, and master the many facets of craftsmanship... secrets" (Amirov 2000, 146).

Among the successes of the new prose in the South, one can also mention works written in a satirical and humorous style. First of all, prose writers conveyed existing and urgent problems to the public in a satirical language. Writers writing in this style once again demonstrated that they took a more realistic and objective position and were far from idealizing political, economic, literary and cultural

problems in society. They even had their writings published under secret signatures. Despite all the difficulties, South Azerbaijani prose has created true masterpieces of art (pearls) and has mobilized all its efforts and skills on this path. M.H. Hasari's "Ali and Marjan", I. Hadi's "Dusky Days", B. Iftikhari's "A Sad Memory of a Night", Savala's "Gul and Dew", A. Azerlu's "Who Are They?", and other such stories have been written, and a number of successes have been achieved overall.

The stories written are dedicated to various topics. In the stories, the tragic fates of people, the ugliness of society, injustice and other issues have always made the writers think, and they have tried to show the readers the worries of believers, the suffering they endure, and the ways to solve all these problems. When reviewing the modern South Azerbaijani prose, it is possible to see that the novel genre is not very functional in literary circles. This is primarily due to certain objective and subjective reasons (Kodyrov 1982). Rahim Daqiqi, one of the prose representatives of literature that was repressed before the Islamic Revolution, was a South Azerbaijani. He became a victim of repression in 1937 and was exiled to Kazakhstan with his family. From there he was sent to Iran.

One of the prominent representatives of South Azerbaijani prose is Ali Dashgin. In his story "The Village Bride", illiteracy and ignorance were criticized. He expressed his thoughts as follows: "As everyone knows, in our country (South Azerbaijan is meant)" for many years there has been no school, writing, musical instruments, games... in our native language, Turkish, and we were all far from such a beautiful and necessary existence. After the overthrow of the Shah system, occasional Turkish writings, unfinished diaries, and occasional literary circles began to appear.

But this seemed and still seems to be inappropriate for our Turkish language, which has a very inadequate and extensive writing. Leaving these aside, all that was written that saw the light of day was poetry, and ninety-nine percent of the poems were very weak and chewed-up words due to ignorance and illiteracy. There is no room for condemning anyone here, there is no room for scolding. Since poetry is short and can be said from the heart, all writings turned to it and began to say everything they thought (Daşgin 2000, 3).

When we look at the work of Ganjali Sabah, his story "Intigam" is like an artistic excursion into the history of social contradictions of the recent past. It should also be noted that this story of the writer was published in the magazine "Dede Gorgud". In the story, an attempt is

made to awaken the human feelings that have been destroyed in the reader's heart as a result of the combination of the motive of jealousy and tragedy. Of course, we see that the tendency to reveal human destinies with deep psychologism in the story is not so strong, and therefore this work can be called one of the first examples of the transition to new prose (Dorri 2005, 192).

It should also be noted that, without a doubt, the literature of Southern Azerbaijan has been and remains an integral part of Azerbaijani literature (*Sovremennaya iranskaya proza* 2010, 336). Azerbaijani literature is a very rich literature. Every period, epoch has its own literature and creative people. The existence of national literature is nourished and revived by the pearls created by the writers and creative people of that side (South) and that side (North) representing it.

Without any doubt, South Azerbaijani literature remains an integral and rich component of the overall Azerbaijani literary heritage (*Sovremennaya iranskaya proza* 2010). Each historical epoch is defined by its unique creative figures and intellectual achievements. The vitality of this national tradition is sustained and revived by the masterpieces produced by writers from both the North and the South, who collectively represent its unified essence.

The comprehensive influence of Azerbaijani poets and prose writers on Iranian and South Azerbaijani artistic poetry and prose, and their creativity, throughout all periods is an undeniable fact. In short, it should be noted that South Azerbaijan literature is a rich literature and the role of North Azerbaijan writers in the development of this literature is irreplaceable. When referring to the lives and works of Iranian and South Azerbaijani writers, they include Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1203), Mahammad Fuzuli (1494-1556), Molla Panah Vagif (1717-1797), Qasimbey Zakir (1784-1857), Mirza Alakbar Sabir (1862-1911), Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (1869-1932), Mirza Fatali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), Suleyman Sani Akhundov (1875-1939), Abdulla Shaig (1881-1959), Aliaga Vahid (1895-1965), Samad Vurgun (1906-1956) named Suleyman. It is impossible to not notice the influence of Rustam (1906-1989), Mammad Rahim (1907-1977), Rasul Rza (1910-1981), Mirvarid Dilbazi (1912-2001), Nabi Khazri (1924-2007), Bakhtiyar Vahabzade (1925-2006), Mammad Araz (1933-2004) and others. All the famous poets and writers of Iran and South Azerbaijan were influenced by the valuable works of these penmen, wrote epigrams, similes, vows and so on. The works of these

artists were an inexhaustible source of inspiration for them and a school in the truest sense of the word.

Conclusion

The literary environment of South Azerbaijan between 1947 and 1978 represents a significant chapter in the history of Azerbaijani culture, characterized by a profound struggle for linguistic and national preservation. Despite the systematic cultural and political pressures of the Pahlavi regime, including the prohibition of the mother tongue and the destruction of books, the creative community demonstrated exceptional resilience. This period saw the evolution of literature from traditional forms into a powerful medium for national consciousness. The monumental influence of Mohammad-Hossein Shahriyar's "Saying Hello to Heydarbaba," alongside the emergence of patriotic poetry and satirical prose, proves that literature functioned as the primary guardian of the people's identity. Furthermore, the continuous intellectual exchange with Northern Azerbaijani classical and modern traditions ensured that South Azerbaijani literature remained an inseparable part of the broader Azerbaijani cultural heritage. In summary, the years 1947–1978 were not merely a time of repression, but a transformative era that laid the ideological foundation for future generations of writers and thinkers in South Azerbaijan.

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