



THE QORI TEACHERS' SEMINARY AND EMINENT FIGURES IN THE HISTORY OF AZERBAIJANI CULTURE

EL SEMINARIO DE MAESTROS DE QORI Y FIGURAS EMINENTES DE LA HISTORIA DE LA CULTURA AZERBAIYANA

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Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Ismayil Akbarov, G., Mamo Agalarov, A., & Qanbar Mammadli, N. (2025). The Qori teachers' seminary and eminent figures in the history of Azerbaijani culture. *Revista Conrado*, 21(105), e4506.

ABSTRACT

The national development of any people is determined by their education, intellectuals, literature, connection to historical heritage, and the means of transmitting their cultural identity and worldview to future generations. In Azerbaijan, the nation's leading intellectuals played a pivotal role in preserving and safeguarding national culture. An historical landmark was the foundation in 1876 of the Qori Teachers' Seminary as an educational institution where representatives of various ethnic groups from the South Caucasus would study together. Azerbaijani students, however, constituted a minority within the seminary due to the prerequisite of Russian language proficiency. In 1879, an Azerbaijani branch of the seminary was established to facilitate the education of Azerbaijani children. This branch was officially referred to as the "Tatar Department," as Azerbaijanis were commonly identified as Tatars by Russians at the time. The newly founded department was led by Aleksey Osipovich Chernyaevsky, an ethnic Russian born and educated in the Azerbaijani city of Shamakhi. The seminary became an important educational institution, with several distinguished Azerbaijani scholars and cultural figures among its alumni, including Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Nariman Narimanov, Muslim Magomayev, Rashid bey Efendiyev, and others. Despite numerous restrictions at the seminary, Azerbaijani students expanded their academic knowledge and emerged as progressive intellectuals advocating democratic ideals in Azerbaijan. This study aims to analyze the historical role of the Qori Teachers' Seminary in shaping the intellectual and cultural development of

prominent Azerbaijani figures, and to highlight how this institution contributed to the national awakening through education.

Keywords:

Seminary, Equal Education, Qualified Teachers, Enlightenment.

RESUMEN

El desarrollo nacional de cualquier pueblo está determinado por su educación, su intelectualidad, su literatura, su conexión con el patrimonio histórico y los medios para transmitir su identidad cultural y cosmovisión a las generaciones futuras. En Azerbaiyán, los principales intelectuales del país desempeñaron un papel fundamental en la preservación y salvaguardia de la cultura nacional. Un hito histórico fue la fundación en 1876 del Seminario de Maestros de Qori, institución educativa donde estudiaban juntos representantes de diversos grupos étnicos del Cáucaso Sur. Sin embargo, los estudiantes azerbaiyanos constituían una minoría dentro del seminario debido al requisito del dominio del ruso. En 1879, se estableció una rama azerbaiyana del seminario para facilitar la educación de los niños azerbaiyanos. Esta rama se conocía oficialmente como el "Departamento Tártaro", ya que los rusos de la época solían identificar a los azerbaiyanos como tártaros. El departamento recién fundado estaba dirigido por Aleksey Osipovich Chernyaevsky, un ruso étnico nacido y educado en la ciudad azerbaiyana de Shamakhi. El seminario se convirtió en una importante institución educativa, con varios distinguidos académicos y figuras



culturales azerbaiyanas entre sus exalumnos, como Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Nariman Narimanov, Muslim Magomayev, Rashid bey Efendiyev, entre otros. A pesar de las numerosas restricciones en el seminario, los estudiantes azerbaiyanos ampliaron sus conocimientos académicos y se consolidaron como intelectuales progresistas que defendían los ideales democráticos en Azerbaiyán. Este estudio busca analizar el papel histórico del Seminario de Maestros Qori en la formación del desarrollo intelectual y cultural de destacadas figuras azerbaiyanas y destacar cómo esta institución contribuyó al despertar nacional a través de la educación.

Palabras clave:

Seminario, Educación Igualitaria, Profesores Cualificados, Ilustración.

INTRODUCTION

From the first half of the 19th century, Azerbaijani territories became a battleground between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran. This conflict ultimately led to the division of Azerbaijan's territory between the two empires. The northern part of Azerbaijan, corresponding to the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan, came under Russian administration and was governed according to the imperial system (Gasimov, 2011; Zeynaloglu, 2020). As in all other spheres, education was regulated within the framework of imperial laws, with every aspect closely monitored and controlled. The primary focus was on excluding non-Russians from educational opportunities. In particular, children of Muslim communities were largely denied access to schooling (Iskenderova, 2023). Only the children of high-ranking state officials serving within the Russian administration were permitted to receive an education. Naturally, instruction was conducted exclusively in Russian. But gradually, the imperial authorities recognized the necessity of incorporating local representatives into the administration, particularly those who would serve the empire with loyalty. Consequently, efforts were initiated to train personnel who would work as teachers in rural districts and provinces (Bayram Oglu, 2021). To facilitate this, teacher training seminaries were established under the supervision of local administrative bodies, known as *zemstvos*, based on the educational model developed by the distinguished pedagogue Konstantin Dmitrievich Ushinsky. The first such seminary in the South Caucasus was founded in 1876 in the city of Gori, Georgia (Mahmudov, 2005, p. 151).

The newly established educational institution included schools designed to provide equal education for the children of three ethnic groups—Russians, Armenians, and

Georgians. Nevertheless, instruction in these schools was conducted in Russian. No separate department was created for Azerbaijani Turks, despite their being the largest ethnic group in the South Caucasus. The absence of Azerbaijani-speaking teachers and the lack of efforts to enroll Azerbaijani youth in the seminary resulted in the exclusion of an Azerbaijani department from the institution. During this period, there was a growing demand for qualified Muslim Azerbaijani teachers to staff existing and newly established schools in various villages across Azerbaijan (Oglu Rzayev, 2021). These issues, along with the growing protests of progressive Azerbaijani intellectuals against ethnic discrimination towards Muslims, pressured the Tsarist government to deviate from the official requirements of the Regulations on Teachers' Seminaries. As a result, with the approval of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, the Tatar (Azerbaijani) department of the seminary was established in 1879 (Hajiyev, 2019, p. 33).

The researcher Aziz Mirahmadov provides a detailed account of the establishment of the Azerbaijani branch of the Qori Teachers' Seminary, its Azerbaijani students, and prominent figures such as Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Muslim Magomayev, and others. He writes: "According to a document preserved in the Manuscripts Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani department at the Qori Seminary was established on the initiative of the great writer and thinker M.F. Akhundov." This document, bearing the autograph of the renowned educator Rashid bey Efendiyev, is titled "A Brief Historical Account of Aleksey Osipovich Chernyaevsky, Inspector of the Turkic Department of the South Caucasus Seminary." According to the information provided in this document, after reviewing Mirza Fatali Akhundov's proposal and report, the Viceroy of the Caucasus approved the establishment of an independent "Tatar (Azerbaijani) Department" at the Qori Teachers' Seminary for a three-year period to serve the Turkic population. "If the experiment proves successful, the seminary shall be relocated to the center of Azerbaijan after three years" (Mirhasanov, 1983, p. 85). The department's operation was officially legalized by Emperor Alexander II of Russia through a decree issued on May 13th, 1880.

The Qori Teachers' Seminary was considered one of the most advanced seminaries in Russia in terms of organizing the teaching process. At the 1900 World Expo held in Paris, the institution was awarded a gold medal for its organization of methodological work (Mahmudov, 2005, p. 151). Despite this, there is a gap in academic literature regarding the impact this institution had on the educational development of the Caucasus. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to conduct a historical analysis of

the role the Qori Teachers' Seminary played in the training of eminent intellectuals and cultural figures of the region (mainly Azerbaijanis) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Attention was paid to how their education at this institution influenced their ideological, pedagogical, and cultural development. It is noted that the seminary fostered the emergence of a generation of prominent figures, such as Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, and Firidun bey Kocherli, who later became pioneers of national consciousness and educational reform in Azerbaijan. The research methodology employed is based primarily on historical and documentary analysis, drawing on archival records, biographical studies, and secondary sources to trace the careers of these individuals and assess the seminary's overall sociocultural impact.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

After the declaration of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, special attention was given to the development of public education and the nationalization of education, alongside other pressing issues (Bayramov, 2015). Efforts were promptly initiated to address the shortage of qualified teachers in the republic. The first step in this regard was the relocation of the Azerbaijani branch of the Qori Seminary to the city of Qazakh (Gafarova, 2012). By the decision of the Azerbaijani government, chaired by F.X. Khoisky, on June 22th, 1918, a sum of 5,000 rubles was allocated to the former inspector of the Transcaucasian (Qori) Teachers' Seminary, F. Kocherlinsky. As a result of F. Kocherlinsky's direct organization and efforts, the Azerbaijani branch of the seminary was moved to Qazakh and operated as an independent institution. By the order of the Minister of Public Education, N. Yusifbeyli, dated October 12, 1918, with order number 39, Firidun bey Köçərli was appointed as the director of the Qazakh Teachers' Seminary, effective from October 1st, 1918 (Safarov, 2023). Over the course of its 39 years of operation, the Azerbaijani department of the Qori Teachers' Seminary produced more than two hundred teachers for Azerbaijani schools. Among them were prominent intellectuals, public figures, and statesmen, such as Rashid bey Efendiyev, Firidun bey Kocherli, Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Nariman Narimanov, Muslim Magomayev, Suleyman Sani Akhundov, Hacibala Suleymanov, Osman Efendiyev, Farhad Agazadeh, Nurmammad Shahsuvarov, Museyib Ilyasov, Isfandiyar Vekilov, and the Shikhlinski family. These individuals played a crucial role in the advancement of the Azerbaijani national enlightenment movement and the development of national consciousness.

One of the notable graduates of the Qori Teachers' Seminary was the distinguished literary scholar and public figure Firidun bey Kocherli. In 1879, he was admitted

to the preparatory class of the Azerbaijani department of the Qori Teachers' Seminary, where he paid special attention to the study of humanities and languages during the educational process. In his spare time, Firidun bey Kocherli read works by famous Russian educators and scholars, wrote parts of their biographies, and in doing so, prepared a new direction for his future. Like other students of the seminary, he strengthened his knowledge by including excerpts from the works of great Russian writers—such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, and others—in the albums he created. These activities greatly influenced his development into a cultured and well-rounded specialist, combating ignorance and illiteracy (Gasimova, 2023).

After completing his six-year education at the Qori Seminary, Firidun bey Kocherli began his pedagogical career at the gymnasium in the city of Irevan, one of the ancient settlements of Azerbaijani Turks. There, he taught subjects such as the Azerbaijani language, sharia, and calligraphy. In 1890, Firidun bey Kocherli, along with teacher Səfərali bey Vəlibəyov, traveled to Crimea, to Bakhchisarai, where they met with Ismail bey Qaspirali. In 1895, by the order of the Transcaucasian educational district, Firidun bey Kocherli was appointed as a teacher at the Qori Teachers' Seminary (1896-1917). From this point onward, a new phase in Firidun bey's scientific, pedagogical, and literary-public activities began. Between 1905 and 1908, Firidun bey Kocherli took the initiative to serve as the inspector of the Azerbaijani department of the seminary. In 1917, he was appointed as the inspector of the Azerbaijani department of the Special South Caucasus Committee.

In 1917, Firidun bey Kocherli became involved in the political processes of the South Caucasus and joined the "Musavat" party. On May 28, 1918, he was elected as a member of the Azerbaijani National Council (Mahmudov, 2005, p. 84). During his time in Qazakh, he primarily focused on the education of the people and was less engaged in the political processes. However, after the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Bolsheviks accused Firidun bey Kocherli of "treason against the people" and "seizing land and property," leading to his arrest. They managed to obtain a death sentence for him (in 1920). Professor C. Qasimov, based on archival materials, has provided information regarding Firidun bey Kocherli's arrest and the claims made by the Soviet authorities against him. He further notes that the Bolsheviks accused the activists of the "Musavat" party of abusing their authority and deceiving the people while in power. However, an examination of Firidun bey Kocherli's biography reveals that he never deceived the people; rather, he dedicated himself to their enlightenment and progress. In his testimony during the investigation, he even stated that he had

donated 60 desyatinas of land, inherited from his father, to the peasants (Köçərli, 2013, pp. 15–17).

The renowned writer, playwright, journalist, and public figure, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, who fought against ignorance and illiteracy in Azerbaijan with all his resources, was also a graduate of the Qori Teachers' Seminary. The Qori Teachers' Seminary played a significant role in his spiritual development and the formation of his worldview. The years he spent studying there (1882-1887) were crucial in shaping his educational background, future teaching career, and literary destiny. His active participation in all literary and cultural events organized by the seminary, his connection with the seminary's library, and his study of the classical works of Russian and world literature had a significant impact on the formation of the great writer's worldview (Jamalov, 2020).

In his research, academician Isa Həbibbəyli identified three main directions through which the Qori Teachers' Seminary influenced Mirza Jalil's ideological and spiritual development: the seminary's social-ideological environment, its educational and pedagogical environment, and its literary-cultural environment. He emphasized that the essence of the social-ideological environment was characterized by the state's policy and the worldview of the officials leading the seminary. The educational-pedagogical environment was defined by the organization of various educational activities and the use of progressive pedagogical ideas, while the literary-cultural environment was marked by the hosting of literary and cultural events (Habibbayli, 2016, pp. 64–87).

In the 1890s, as a result of the imperialist policies of Tsarism and the dominance of feudal backwardness, there were no Azerbaijani-language press organs in the country. As a result, the intellectuals of the time published their writings in newspapers such as *Kaspi*, *Kavkaz*, and *Novoe Obozrenie*. Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, like other progressive young intellectuals, published his journalistic works in such media outlets. Later, he gathered intellectuals who led the people, advocating for the importance of literacy and striving for progress, around him with ideas on the necessity of educating the masses and freeing them from backwardness.

Jalil Mammadguluzadeh succeeded in the publication of the *Molla Nasraddin* journal, which criticized the shortcomings of his time, particularly illiteracy and ignorance. Through this journal, he sought to draw the people's attention to how backwardness, ignorance, and fanaticism in the Muslim world hindered national development. In the words of academician I. Həbibbəyli, "Thanks to Jalil Mammadguluzadeh's diligent efforts and effective work, the *Molla Nasraddin* journal, which began its activity, had a programmatic character in terms of discovering,

revealing, and nurturing a new literary generation" (Habibbayli, 2016, p. 265).

To recognize Jalil Mammadguluzadeh solely for his educational activities would limit his work. Mirza Jalil was also active in the ideological sphere, fighting for the resolution of the people's social and everyday issues and challenging the indifference of government circles towards the public. Certainly, with "*Molla Nəsrəddin*," he boldly advanced on this path, successfully conveying his key ideas to the intended audience. Following the establishment of Soviet rule, the Bolsheviks sought to alter the editorial direction of "*Molla Nəsrəddin*," attempting to shift its focus toward domestic issues, thus transforming it into a journal primarily concerned with everyday life. However, even in this situation, Mirza Jalil continued to focus on spreading his national ideology.

Researchers have highlighted that the great writer was a democrat who firmly stood against national oppression with his pen. One of the scholars of *Molla Nəsrəddin*, PhD in Philology and Associate Professor İman Cəfərov, in the third issue of the journal, dated November 19th, 1922, expressed his views on the exportation of Nakhchivan salt, the plundering of the people's property, and espionage in the following manner: "... In a brief news piece, the main issue that concerns the author is the shift in focus during the Bolshevik dictatorship, where people were directed not towards knowledge, education, school, theater, advancement, and progress, but rather towards espionage. Similarly, the reporter expresses concern that, while the country's population remains deprived of national wealth, these resources are being exported. The news related to Nakhchivan further confirms that the initial groundwork for the 1937 repression was laid as early as the 1920s" (Jafarov, 2019, p. 17).

In addition, Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, a prominent composer, educator, and public figure, played a significant role in the development of progressive thought in the South Caucasus (Rice, 2021). Born in 1885, Hacıbəyov began his primary education at a Russian-Tatar school in Shusha. In 1899, he entered the *Zaqafqaziya* - Qori Teachers' Seminary, where he completed his studies in July 1904. As a graduate of Qori, Hacıbəyov became one of the leading figures in 20th-century Azerbaijani public thought. Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, who is not only a prominent figure in Azerbaijani music history but also a key figure in modern culture, was one of the Azerbaijani, or as referred to in the context of that period, Muslim seminarists of the Qori Teachers' Seminary. His youth and the early stages of his public and creative activities were deeply connected to his time at the Seminary. These were the years when the Tsarist authorities adopted a reactionary stance in the field of education and showed no interest in educating Muslim children. However, as the need to govern the

newly incorporated territories of the empire through local administrators grew, there was an increasing demand for specialists who could speak Russian. In this regard, the seminaries established in major cities played a key role. Despite the strict disciplinary regulations at the seminary, which did not align with his national consciousness, Üzeyir Hacıbəyov managed to read the works of progressive thinkers of his time. He prepared himself for a future as an enlightened, democratic, and free-thinking specialist. He paid particular attention to music lessons, and often performed freely at various musical events.

One of the prominent educators and pedagogues who played a significant role in the enlightenment of the people was Mahmud bəy Mahmudbəyov, a graduate of the Qori Seminary. In 1907, based on his 24 years of teaching experience, M. Mahmudbəyov published the first "New Alphabet" textbook for first-grade students, which was reprinted 16 times under different titles such as "Qiraət", "First Year", "Turkish Alphabet", and "Initial Reading" until 1923. In 1908, he co-authored the "Second Year" textbook with five other graduates of the Qori Seminary, and in 1909, he published the "Third Year" textbook together with Abbas Səhhət. In 1914, Mahmudbəyov published the book "The First Step into Turkish Literature," which served as the first anthology designed mainly for upper-grade students in primary schools to study Azerbaijani and Turkish literature. His textbooks played a crucial role during a period when there was significant confusion in Azerbaijani orthography.

M. Mahmudbəyov, who continued his teaching career until the end of his life, played a significant role in writing new textbooks that met the requirements for teaching the Azerbaijani language. He was also the editor of the "Rəhbər" journal. Despite limited funding, which resulted in only five issues of the journal being published, it managed to promote educational ideas and raise several social and political issues. Later, he continued his pedagogical career as a teacher at the 2nd Russian-Tatar school in Baku, and subsequently as its director. In 1919, he was appointed as an inspector for four districts of the Baku Governorate.

One of the prominent figures in the 19th-century history of Azerbaijani science and education was Rəşid bəy Əfəndiyev. During the years of tsarist colonial policies, Rəşid bəy set a true example of patriotism through his invaluable contributions to Azerbaijani science and education. Born in 1863 in Şəki, Rəşid bəy received his initial education at a religious school (mollakhana). After completing his education at a mosque school at the age of 10, he continued his studies at the Russian-language kazas and city schools. A few years later, he entered the Qori Teachers' Seminary and graduated in 1882. Rəşid bəy then worked

as a teacher in rural schools for ten years, gaining direct insight into the state of education in Azerbaijani villages. He focused on addressing the textbook issues in rural schools and worked to increase efforts in that direction. To meet the educational needs of students, he published textbooks that included original works and translations (Administrative Department of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023).

The textbooks he authored, *Uşaq Bağçası* and *Bəsirətül ətfal*, gained great recognition in the field of education. In 1892, Rəşid bəy moved to Tiflis and worked as the deputy secretary in the Caucasian Muslim Administration. In the following years, he entered the Aleksandrovsk Teachers' Institute and earned the right to teach in city schools. In 1900, he was appointed as a teacher at the Azerbaijan branch of the Qori Teachers' Seminary. Regarding the documents stored in the Azerbaijan State Historical Archive, researcher and archivist S. Kamalova writes about Rəşid bəy Əfəndiyev's activities: "Among the documents preserved in the State Historical Archive, those bearing Rəşid bəy's name mainly belong to the fonds of the Azerbaijan branch of the South Caucasus Teachers' Seminary. In the protocol of the commission's work on the issues of practical exercises conducted with the students of the Tatar section of the Qori Teachers' Seminary, dated May 22, 1911, his name is mentioned alongside F. Köçərli, Ə. Maqomayev, and Ə. Muxtarov" (Kamalova, 2023).

A.O. Černyajevski wrote the textbook *Mother Tongue* for the Azerbaijan section of the Qori Teachers' Seminary, which consisted of two parts (the first part written in 1882 and the second in 1888). The textbook was based on the methods and practices of the Russian pedagogue Konstantin Ushinsky and was developed using the "sound method" from Ushinsky's textbook. Černyajevski also used materials from Ushinsky's textbook, translating some texts into Azerbaijani and including them in the second part of the *Mother Tongue* textbook (Hüsenova, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

In 19th-century Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus in general, as part of an imperialist policy, Tsarist Russia deliberately obstructed the educational advancement of Muslim populations, particularly Azerbaijanis, by restricting access to education and marginalizing native languages and cultural instruction. Despite these systemic barriers, a generation of enlightened Azerbaijani intellectuals, many of whom were graduates of the Qori Teachers' Seminary, emerged as key agents of national revival. While the seminary was originally established to serve the imperial agenda of cultivating loyal administrators, the Azerbaijani department, created in response to persistent demands from local reformers, became a transformative space where students absorbed progressive

pedagogical ideas and developed a strong sense of civic and cultural responsibility. Graduates such as Firidun bey Kocherli, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, Mahmud bəy Mahmudbəyov, Rashid bey Efendiyev became pioneering educators, writers, and public figures who promoted national consciousness and modern education in Azerbaijan. Undoubtedly, their work in rural schools and public life laid the intellectual and institutional foundations for a national enlightenment movement.

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