

The First Influences of Western Literature on Azerbaijan Literature: Modernism and Tradition in the Works of Akhundzadeh

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Keywords	Abstract
M.F.Akhundzade modernism and tradition culture philosophy	<p>The views expressed in this article the attitude of the prominent Azerbaijani thinker Akhundzadeh towards the West and the East. By comparing it with his attitude toward the East, one may understand his attitude toward the West on every given issue. Akhundzadeh's perspective on the West and the East was examined in the works, and the impact of his philosophy on our literature was also clarified. Here are some of Akhundzadeh's approaches to religion and literature as they relate to the issues facing the West and the East. In addition, for a proper understanding of Akhundzadeh's attitude towards the West, many quotations that reveal his attitude towards the West and the East have been mentioned, and the thinker's views have been discussed throughout the article.</p> <p>The article also mentions the points where Akhundzadeh's attitude toward the West diverged. Thus, his attitude towards Tsarist Russia and Europe is also differentiated.</p> <p>The points that akhundzadeh opposes existing traditions in Azerbaijani and Eastern Literature in general, supports Western literary traditions, and the advantages that will be achieved through the application of innovations are listed. Akhundzadeh's role in the integration of existing Sciences in Europe to the East was noted.</p> <p>The essay emphasized how Akhundzadeh's attitude toward both civilizations was evident in his creative, scientific, and philosophical achievements.</p>

Introduction

The first well-known figure in Azerbaijani literature to oppose classicism and eastern literary traditions was M. F. Akhundzadeh. Presenting him only as a representative of Azerbaijani literature would be incorrect. As a result, he was the head of the enlightened movement known for its impact in the East and one of the first representatives of the materialist philosophy in the East, which at the time was gaining traction in the West.



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His proficiency in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish facilitates his study of the literature and cultures of the peoples of Central Asia and the East, as well as his ability to grasp all aspects of Islamic culture.

Akhundzadeh was among the first to advocate for literary concerns in Russian, which was the primary means by which the developed scientific and literary corpus of the West reached Azerbaijan and Iran.

In Azerbaijani literature, M. F. Akhundzadeh is considered the creator of dramaturgy, literary criticism, and realism. With his numerous creative ideas, he served as a bridge between the two civilizations and literatures, having studied both Russian and Western literature.

What are our article's goals and objectives? In Eastern literature, M. F. Akhundzadeh carries particular significance. Even though he was educated in a traditional Eastern manner, was well-versed in Eastern literature, and even penned his early works in this genre, he was against the classical writing that developed in this region, which utilized themes and repetitions. His preference was for works that reflected actual life and had a fresh narrative. The article's primary objective is to examine the causes of this and how it has affected our literature—that is, how Western literature has influenced Eastern literature, particularly Azerbaijani literature.

Literary Contributions and Philosophical Views of M.F. Akhundzadeh

The first systematic articles in the theoretical and scientific literature of Azerbaijan were published by Akhundzadeh. In classical Eastern literature, literary issues or critical issues are in the form of incomplete information given as a piece of fiction in works without a plot or with a partial plot. Let's examine Fuzuli's gazelle, "Soz" (*The Word*) as an illustration.

Artıran söz qədrini sidqilə qədrin artırır,
Kim nə miqdar olsa, əhlin eylər ol miqdar söz.

(Meaning: Whoever makes the word more valuable, confidently adds value to himself. He talks as much as he is worth talking about.)

The phrase "to come from nothing" in Fuzuli's sense, which reveals to the public a person's innermost thoughts, serves as a measure and indication of a poet's skill. Knowing the worth of one's word enhances one's own worth (Yusifoglu, 2015). This example demonstrates how literary concerns are presented and analyzed by a critic in traditional Eastern literature. The idea is that this was the state of all literary and critical concerns prior to Akhundzadeh. Because of his command of the Russian language and his mentorship of Russian literature, Akhundzadeh was able to offer a fresh, methodical critique of European literature.

On the other hand, Akhundzadeh was worried about the deviation of Islam from its original path, its transformation into superstition, and the abundance of such approaches in literature. All literature has been overtaken by classical poetry, and the creative energy of writing has been exterminated by repetition. "In the general spirit of Akhundzadeh's works, the importance of realism, which was founded by Akhundzadeh, and the promotion of the unnecessaryness of classicism occupy the main place" (Babazadeh, 2018).

Akhundzadeh fought for the lack of plot and unnecessary repetitions in classical literature. He categorized the works of classical poets. For example, he calls Fuzuli a master of poetry but noted that there



is not enough influence in his poems. This means that although his poetry contains proper measure, rhyme, rhythm, and harmony, they have no meaning. Akhundzadeh adds Movlana Jamaledin Rumi to his list as well. Despite his belief that idealism leads to a weakness in Movlana's works, he finds that his use of storyline and realistic, alive paintings set him apart from the rest (Valiyev, 2014).

Akhundzadeh's most famous literary works are the poem *The Oriental Poem (Lament on the Death of Pushkin)* (1837), *Hekayati Molla Ibrahim-Khalil Kimyagar* (1850), *The Story of Monsieur Jourdan, a Botanist and the Dervish Mastalishah, a Famous Sorcerer* (1850), *Adventures of the Lankaran Khanate Vizier* (1850), *Hekayati Khirsi-Kuldurbasan* (1851), *Sarguzeshti Mardi-Khasis (Haji Kara)* (1852) comedies, the play *The Story of the Appeal Lawyers* (1855), and the satirical stories *The Deceived Kavakib (The Story of Yusif Shah)* (1857). Akhundzadeh's scientific and philosophical works include *Letters with Kemaluddov*, *Doctor-English Yuma zasav*, *Argument with Molla Alakbar*, *Fehiristi-kitab*, *Khitab ber katib*, *Khitab ber nagil*, *About Verse and Prose*, *Criticism about Mirza Agha's Plays*, *On Rumi and His Work*, *Criticism of the Columnist of the "Millat" Newspaper of High Iran*, *About One Word*, *John Stewart about National Freedom*, *About the Muharram Ritualism*, *Babylonian Beliefs*, *Hikayat*, *The Parable of Sismond*, etc.

Azerbaijani literature was impacted by Arabic and religious themes as Islam expanded in the seventh century. True, there are occasional exceptions, but not many. This impact starts to lessen in the 19th century, which might push both Western and Islamic culture. War is the exact cause of these consequences. "Cultural integration occurs through different factors such as war, trade, and religion" (Bloch, 1985). The invasion of the Arabs and the spread of the Islamic religion brought Eastern literary traditions to literature, while the occupation of Tsarist Russia replaced this tradition with the Western literary tradition. As we have seen, the factor of religion and occupation plays a key role here.

If we go further back, we will see that the territory of Azerbaijan bears traces of different cultures due to nomadic tribes—from the dualism spoken in *Avesta* to the image of Tepegoz (Cyclops) in *Kitabi-Dede Gorgud*. However, this can be said not only about the nomadic Turkic tribes settled in Azerbaijan but also about the tribes settled in the territory of Turkey. "The migration of the Turks from these nomadic tribes to different geographies from their own geographies allowed them to encounter many civilizations and create different syntheses because they lived semi-nomadically. As a result, the Turks got acquainted with the great Islamic culture that dominates the Eastern culture" (Hüseyn, İbrahim, & Ishak, 2009).

However, it should be noted that Islamic culture has been distanced from its originality by the dominance of various states over Azerbaijan's territory, invasions, the multiplicity of ethnic elements, the assimilation of various cultures by the aforementioned nomads, and the trade that took place along the Silk Road across a vast geographic area. These problems cause myths and superstitions unconnected to religion to proliferate and cause the general public's scientific quotient to decline.

The country's split into khanates and the deterioration of the primary economic routes and cultural connections severely diminished the people's sense of national and ethnic identity on the eve of the invasion of Tsarist Russia. Akhundzadeh plays the role of a bridge between Tsarist Russia, which has just invaded Azerbaijan, and those masses. A. A. Bakikhanov was one of those who undertook this mission. Akhundzadeh's first attempt to improve literacy was the "Alifba Project" (Musayev, 2021).



Tsarist Russia was his closest ally on this issue. The essential point is that expanding business utility was a major factor in the fact that a large portion of the populace at least knew the regulations governing the administration of the newly conquered territories. One of the key tenets of the Tsarism policy was the exclusive participation of women in the industrial process. Mass exploitation was hard to implement since Eastern thought did not support it.

Although they are founded on distinct objectives, Akhundzade's thoughts are consistent with Tsarism in that they criticize all the twisted, obsessive notions of Eastern-Islamic thought (Nuriyeva, 2015). However, over a certain period of time, we see that the invaders' interest in educating the people has decreased, and on the contrary, they are supporting local religious authorities and giving them special privileges. In certain sources, the reason for this is the uprisings led by the clergy in Azerbaijan (Caucasian Muslims Administration, n.d.).

Working in the civil service between these two civilizations, Akhundzadeh combines aspects of both cultures into his plays as a writer and playwright. Thanks to his employment in the public service during the Russian Tsarist viceroyalty, he is more acquainted with the current processes.

Based on the aforementioned claims, let us examine the influences of both Western and Eastern philosophy and culture on Akhundzadeh's writings. Let us first concentrate on scientific works. He discusses "stenography" in England in the essay *A New Alphabet for the Writing of Islamic Languages Consisting of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish* (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. III). There are many benefits to this type of rapid writing, but this art cannot be practiced with Arabic calligraphy, as the pen should not be separated from the paper at this time. The dots in the Arabic script do not allow this. Because most letters are spelled the same, the only difference is the dots. The author mentions the possibility of applying the European printing system due to the introduction of the alphabet. At this time, a laborious and expensive work such as manual transfer will be eliminated.

Numerous issues arise as a result of the Arabs' influence on poetry. As a result, any event's description is made up for rhyme's sake, which results in writing extra words. But in Europe, new genres were emerging. Akhundzadeh made the initial moves and produced the first works of Eastern literature after becoming familiar with these advances through the Russian language. In his own words, "I myself cannot praise and brag about my works, but I can dare to be proud that I was the first among Muslims to get acquainted with the works known only to Europeans and introduced my compatriots to them" (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. III). In this letter written to Kruzenshterin, the director of the Office of the Viceroy of Tsarist Russia in the Caucasus, he also explains the role of Russian tsarism in the writing of his works: "If my comedies are spread among Muslims, it will lead to the improvement of their morals, and it can perpetuate the glory and goodness of my high-status responsibility (representatives of Tsarist government are meant) which pushed me to such a literary genre" (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. III). It is also clear from the historical facts that during Vorontsov's regency, the people of the Caucasus were asked to write works in new literary genres. Akhundzadeh also makes this note in his letters (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. III). However, it cannot be said that Akhundzadeh's reason for writing comedies and dramas is only this requirement. He himself understood that this was an important point. Writer Chingiz Huseynov's work *Fatal Conquest* reflected this moment with its full reality. When Vorontsov said to Akhundzadeh, "Your people should become European, write a play for this," Akhundzadeh thought, "We have been writing



poetry for centuries, but the people are still illiterate and backward. The time has come to write dramatic works" (Huseynov, 1986).

The intellectual theories of Akhundzadeh, which combined Eastern and Western thought, acquired particular weight in the nineteenth century. In his work *From the History of Social and Philosophical Thought of the 19th Century in Azerbaijan*, eminent philosopher and valuable scientist Heydar Huseynov wrote the following about Akhundzadeh: "Mirza Fatali Akhundov is the most prominent representative of progressive social and philosophical thought of the 19th century in Azerbaijan" (Huseynov, 2007). Heydar Huseynov regards Akhundzadeh as an adherent of the materialist tradition that originated in Russia and Europe.

It's noteworthy to observe his opposition to materialism and idealism in his essay *Hakimi-İngiliz Yuma Javab (The Doctor: The Answer to the English Wash)*. Here, the opinions of philosophers and Shariatists are contrasted, and topics like existence and non-existence and the necessity of a reason are covered that have turned into unique discussion topics worldwide. Akhundzade adopts a somewhat materialistic stance in this instance. According to Shariatists, everything has to have a cause. For instance, a seed requires a tree, just as a sperm needs a begetting one. Consequently, as the cosmos is made up of various objects, it likewise requires a cause. In this instance, the universe may exist and cannot cease to exist. Based on this theory, we may conclude that *wajubul-wujud* is a being that exists and does not require a cause. In this case, the existence of the universe is possible and it is impossible to stop. With this idea, we can judge that there must be a being that does not need a cause, and that is *wajubul-wujud*. It is sufficient in this sense to exist on its own; it's feasible that he is the reason why the cosmos could exist at all. From this *wajubul-wujud*, we ought to see it as the source of all things, except God (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II).

In response, Akhundzade says, "O Shariatists, a thing does not need its essence and a cause, but it is only of one kind to another kind; it needs a reason for its transformation from one state to another" (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II). Akhundzade rejects the veracity of the Shariatists' claims. As we have seen, Akhundzade adopts a materialist stance in contrast to other Eastern thinkers. It should be mentioned that scholars of Islamic philosophy also see certain aspects of Islam as important to the religion, such as the notions that everything has a cause and that God is the creator of all things, among other idealistic concepts (Mehdiyev, 2010).

Knowing the East well, Akhundzadeh believed that new topics should be introduced into literature to further its advancement and compared it to Europe. Therefore, the didactics that originated in the East and have now become customary are not beneficial to individuals. At one time, this genre also existed in Europe. But then its uselessness was understood. Akhundzadeh writes about it like this:

I read *Yek Kelme (An Only Word)* over and over. It is a unique book, a beautiful keepsake, and a useful piece of advice. But it was written for a dead nation. Does anyone in Iran listen to the advice? Previously, in Europe, it was believed that counseling the oppressor would force him to give up his oppressive ways. However, as time went on, people saw that advice had little effect on the oppressor's character. That's why the nation realized the benefits of unity by progressing in science thanks to the unobstructedness of religion, and united with each other, appealing to the tyrant to give up the empire and government! (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II).



The key argument is that didactics held a dominant role in literature up till Akhundzadeh. Whether it was written in *Aruz*, which came to our literature from the Arabs, or written in our national style *heja* (syllable), the works continued to be written in this style. Many examples continued to appear, from the master's books of the lovers to A. Bakikhanov's *Tahzūbil-akhlaq*. Akhundzadeh's struggle slowed down the development of this genre.

Akhundzadeh preferred the existence of a European constitution to religious laws and didactic works. He wrote:

If Sharia is the source of justice, then it must implement equality of law, which is the first basis of the constitution, in the courts (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II).

Akhundzadeh highlighted "personal freedom" as a concern. It is stressed how crucial it is to implement it as a constitutional right. In the story given as an explanation for this, the statements of the four witnesses are not considered reliable because they are not Muslims, and a wrong verdict is given. Akhundzadeh again confronts this issue with Europe and writes that over time, such issues that exist there also hinder development, and therefore Europe quickly turns away from this line:

In the past, the Jesuits in Europe considered it permissible to buy and sell pagan and polytheist slaves and maids based on the fatwa of the Torah. They said that Moses made the buying and selling of pagans and polytheists halal, even obligatory. The Englishman stood up and said that Moses did not understand: Pagans and polytheists are people like us, they are our brothers. The human species cannot be deprived of its right to freedom because of religious separation. That is why they strictly prohibited buying and selling slaves and maids in every corner of the old and new world (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II).

There are issues that are difficult to address or give any opinion about. Going beyond the accepted values in our literature and culture could endanger not only the writer's creativity but also his life. However, Akhundzadeh seems to be more courageous among the thinkers before and after him on certain issues.

Commenting on living without marriage, which is completely forbidden by Islam, Akhundzadeh writes:

A free man and a free woman become very close with each other without a marriage record, with the consent of both parties. Shariat is wrong to punish each of them with a hundred punishments? Isn't this work contrary to the complete security of the human personality (inviolability of the personality, the right to a safe life) and is it not opposed to justice? If the purpose of Sharia from this verse is to protect honor and mentality, then this verse should refer to the adultery of a woman with a husband and a man with a wife (Akhundzadeh, 2005, Vol. II).

Akhundzadeh contends that these individuals ought to take responsibility for their actions and that others shouldn't interfere in their personal affairs. He cannot have his freedom taken away from him, regardless of the error. Since freedom is, in Akhundzadeh's opinion, the most exquisite gift that humanity has ever received. It doesn't take away people's freedom to play pretend and spend little money on games.

Akhundzadeh also highly evaluated the importance of the inviolable nature of life. The precedent of the death penalty being upheld in the East carries on this problem, which has already become a value in



the West. It is true that the tsarist government, especially the tsars, killed anyone they considered a potential threat, but the country's laws prohibited the death penalty.

In general, it is evident from even a cursory examination of Tsarist Russia's legal system that various choices were taken at different points in the empire's history. For instance, in her article *The Death Penalty in the Constitutional Order of the Russian Federation and the Approach of the Constitutional Court*, Zeynab Ozkan writes:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some crimes against religion, state, Tsar, person, or property, such as buying furs without customs, cheating in the salt press, organizing the sale of prohibited substances, evading service, helping fugitive soldiers, were considered within the scope of the death penalty (Gernet, 1913). In the Military Law dated 1715, Tsar Büyük Petro increased the crimes requiring the death penalty to one hundred and twenty-three and the type of execution to twenty. In 1735, Tsar Elizabeth is known as the first ruler to abolish the death penalty. However, the results of this intervention were short-lived. The Emirname of Queen Elizabeth dated 1744 is an example of the legal abolition of the death penalty. According to the decree, all death sentences will be presented to Queen Elizabeth (Ozkan, 2019).

The death penalty in the constitutional system of the Russian Federation and the approach of the constitutional court formed the basis for the legal reform of Tsar Alexander II dated 1864. Mirza Yusif Khan received a copy of a letter written in 1875. The highlighting of legal issues in this piece called *One Word* coincides with the period after the legal reforms implemented by Tsar Nicholas II in 1864. This gives us the impression that Akhundzade was familiar with the processes taking place in Tsarist Russia and supported the policy.

Conclusion

Living in Tiflis, the crossroads of Western and Eastern civilizations, Akhundzadeh was fluent in Azerbaijani, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and Russian. He also studied both cultures and the sciences prevalent in those regions; his writings capture the harmony between the two cultures. This is evident in his creative, scientific, and philosophical works, as discussed in the main section. Apart from the primary conclusion, the article's findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Akhundzadeh systematized literary-critical ideas in Eastern literature before him and brought innovations from Western literature into Eastern literary traditions.
2. Akhundzadeh refuted religious superstition in science and culture, basing his opinions on European scientific models.
3. Akhundzadeh introduced forms that found a home in European literature while opposing the traditions that had ruled the literary world for four to five centuries.
4. Akhundzadeh's writings set aside space for the advocacy of the policies of the present administration.
5. A person's constitutional rights are wholly Western-centric in Akhundzadeh's writings.



Considering all of this, it can be claimed that Akhundzadeh succeeded in establishing Western literary traditions and produced the first Western literary models in the East by rejecting the customs prevalent in Azerbaijani and Eastern literature generally. Akhundzadeh's achievement in this work may be attributed to his understanding of Western traditions and sciences within the context of the Russian Empire.

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