

# **How the positive tolerant model from history affects the country's future: Proposing the Azerbaijan model of tolerance against religious discrimination and intolerance**

Western Caspian University

Dr. Gunel Rahimli, Gunay Heydarli, Ulkar Imanzade

## **Introduction**

Tolerance is the foundation of mutual respect between people and communities and is vital for building a unified global society around shared values. It is a virtue, a moral quality, but above all, tolerance is an act – reaching out to others and accepting existing differences not as obstacles, but as invitations to dialogue and understanding. Looking back at history, we come to the conclusion that many wars have taken place on religious grounds, leading to the killing of innocent people among nations adhering to different religions and sects. These conflicts mainly arose as a result of the emergence of religious intolerance and fanaticism in society, turning into an uncontrollable process. Even today, this threat remains relevant in several countries around the world.

In recent years, regional and global events have demonstrated that religions, which carry the mission of spreading noble values such as kindness, sincerity, and mutual love, promoting high moral standards, ensuring unity and equality among people, and preserving peace and security, have in some cases been used for political purposes, malicious intentions, and to create conflicts among people.

Today, Azerbaijan stands as a unique example of peaceful coexistence among different nationalities and religious communities. In our country, representatives of all religions are provided with the conditions to freely express their religious beliefs, practice their rituals, and perform religious ceremonies without restriction.

Since ancient times, Azerbaijan has been a place where various religions have converged, and people of different faiths have always lived in peace and harmony. They have played an important role in the socio-political life of the Azerbaijani people while preserving their ethnic identity, religion, customs, and traditions. Throughout history, there has been no instance of national, racial, or religious discrimination, hostility, or conflict among the peoples living in our country.

The presented project involves researching Azerbaijan's positive tolerance model based on historical sources, holding meetings with representatives of various ethnic minorities, as well as clarifying the role of gender equality in ensuring tolerance, and creating resources based on these. The project also aims to measure the level of secularism and discrimination among students, by surveying to determine this level and what results have been achieved after awareness-raising measures against the discrimination found.

## **1.The History of Coexistence in Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan is a country with a long history, a vibrant culture, and stunning scenery. It has historically stood at the nexus of several civilizations, including the Scythian-Khazar,

Roman-Byzantine, Achaemenid-Sassanid, and Turkic-Oghuz cultures. Due to its ideal living conditions, this area has served as a "Golden Bridge" connecting the North and the South as well as the West and the East. It has drawn numerous tribes, ethnic groups, and nations.

In addition to thirty distinct national and ethnic groups who reside in small villages spread across the country, the majority of the population of Azerbaijan is made up of Azerbaijanis. In addition to members of the Indo-European (Tats, Talysh, Mountain Jews, Kurds), Caucasian (Udis, Lezgins, Avars, Tsakhurs, Buduqlus, Ingiloys, Kryzs, Khinalugs), and Slavic (Russians, Molokans, Ukrainians) language families, these groups include Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis, Tatars, and Ahiska Turks (Aghayev, 2013).

"On the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Small Nations, and Ethnic Groups Living in Azerbaijan, and State Support for the Development of Their Language and Culture," a 1992 order, states that all of these groups are equal citizens of Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani government has laid the groundwork for the all-encompassing development of national minorities and ethnic groups since achieving independence.

Every ethnic group in Azerbaijan has maintained its unique traits while simultaneously embracing and incorporating many progressive elements of one another's customs, ways of life, and civilizations. These groups have become closer while preserving their languages and anthropological characteristics by upholding shared cohabitation ideals. The Azerbaijani government actively collaborates with numerous international organizations to protect human rights, including the rights of national minorities. Azerbaijan has joined more than 50 international conventions related to human rights and the protection of ethnic minorities.

Approximately 50 non-governmental organizations, cultural centers, and charitable societies operate in Azerbaijan to address the needs of national minorities. More than 15 newspapers and journals are published in the languages of ethnic communities, while over 30 are published in Russian. Television channels frequently broadcast materials about the ethnic-cultural life and ethnography of national minorities. Local radio and television stations operate in five regions where national minorities are densely populated. Additionally, 19 schools offer education solely in Russian, and 6 schools offer education exclusively in Georgian. The nation is home to 345 multicultural schools. A department dedicated to the study of national minorities' religion, culture, history, and ethnography has been formed by the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS).

Azerbaijan, which is home to more than 380 religious communities, is known across the world for its tolerance. Relationships in Azerbaijan are characterized by honesty and integrity rather than by race or religion. The indigenous Azerbaijani Turks have coexisted with members of over 80 ethnic groups for millennia (Aghayev, 2013).

This historical event is a perfect illustration of how national minorities and small ethnic groups can live together in harmony and cooperation without running the risk of going extinct.

The Islamic heritage of acceptance and the historical coexistence of several ethnic communities in a common geographic area are the sources of the tolerance seen in Azerbaijan.

There has never been religious or racial conflict in Azerbaijan's history, nor has there ever been prejudice toward ethnic minorities. The main reason for this is that every citizen

of Azerbaijan is treated equally by the government. Programs for national minorities have had their own section since Public Television's founding.

Public Television's portrayal of ethnic communities' daily lives, customs, and cultural heritage demonstrates the government's dedication to democracy and tolerance. The goal of this endeavor is to uphold Azerbaijan's traditional policy of defending the rights of all ethnic minorities, even those who live in a single village or two.

National minorities are fully entitled to create their own institutions, associations, and cultural centers. There are numerous national cultural centers operating in Azerbaijan nowadays, such as the "Birlik" Society (Quliyeva, 2005).

- The Russian Community

The following are listed: Slavic Cultural Center; Azerbaijan-Israel Community; Ukrainian Society; "Ronai" Kurdish Cultural Center; "Samur" Lezgi National Center; Azerbaijan-Slavic Cultural Center; "Turqan-Tel" Tatar Cultural Center; "Yaşlıq" Tatar Cultural Center; "Crimea" Crimean Tatar Society; Georgian Society; Ingiloy Community; Chechen Cultural Center; Ahıska Turks' "Vatan" Society; Ahıska Turkish Women's "Sona" Society; Talysh Cultural Center; Avar Society; Mountain Jewish Community; Ashkenazi Jewish Community; Georgian-Jewish Community; Women's Humanitarian Association of Jews "Orain" Udi Cultural Center; "Buduq" Cultural Center; "Polonia" Polish Cultural Center; "Mada" International Talysh Association; "Avesta" Talysh Association; "Karelhaus" German Cultural Society;

In regions with high ethnic diversity, there are amateur societies, national and state theaters, and folklore groups. For example, a Lezgi State Theater operates in Qusar, a Georgian State Theater in Qakh, and Talysh folklore groups are active in Astara and Lankaran.

The Azerbaijani government provides financial support to these organizations and promotes mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among all individuals, regardless of their origin, culture, religion, or language. The active participation of national minorities in public life and national events demonstrates the strong mutual respect in Azerbaijan.

Article 21 of the Constitution ensures the free use and development of languages spoken by the population. Article 25 ("Right to Equality") guarantees that "the state ensures the equality of rights and freedoms of all individuals regardless of race, nationality, religion, language, gender, origin, property status, social position, beliefs, political party, trade union, or other public association affiliation." Article 44 ("Right to National Identity") states that "everyone has the right to preserve their national identity and cannot be forced to change it." Article 45 ("Right to Use Native Language") states that "everyone has the right to use their native language. Everyone has the right to receive education and engage in creative activities in their preferred language. No one can be deprived of the right to use their native language."

Azerbaijan actively cooperates with reputable international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in protecting human rights, including the rights of national minorities. The country has joined numerous international agreements, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Azerbaijan was one of the earliest countries where Christianity spread. Historical sources indicate that Christianity began to spread in the territory of Southern Azerbaijan

as early as the 1st century. Initially, the apostles started preaching Christianity in this region. During that period, in the early stages of Christian propagation, pagan temples were adapted for use as churches. The oldest of such churches is considered to be the Kish (Giş) Church. According to M. Kalankatuklu, who provided information about the church, "... this place is the origin of all the churches and cities of the East and is the source of Christianity's acceptance by us Easterners." This unique monument, associated with Saint Eliseus, was the first Christian temple in the Caucasus and had an apostolic origin. Located in the Kish settlement of Sheki, this religious architectural monument has now become one of the most fascinating tourist attractions for international travelers.

According to researcher-architect Gulchohra Mammadova, Eliseus either built a place of worship there or adapted an existing pagan sanctuary for Christian use. During this period, Christianity became the state religion of Caucasian Albania. As a result, the second phase of Christianity's spread began in the 4th century when, under the decree of Albanian ruler Urnayr, land was allocated for churches. From that time onwards, religious architecture in Albania flourished, leading to the construction of Christian temples and churches. The residence of the Albanian Catholicos was located in the city of Tsoghay but was moved to Barda in 552 (Süleymanov, 1987).

Following the Islamic conquests and especially after the fall of the Albanian kingdom, the role of Christianity in the country weakened. Worship in churches began to be conducted in the Armenian language, and the Albanian language was gradually suppressed. During the 8th-9th centuries, when independent states emerged in the territory of Azerbaijan, the Albanian Church regained its autocephalous status. In the 10th-11th centuries, Eastern Christianity was able to maintain a certain level of influence in the region, and this situation continued until the 18th century.

In 1836, by decree of the Russian Tsarist government and under the recommendation of the Holy Synod, the Albanian Church was abolished, and all its property was transferred to the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Albanian Church was once again revived. In 2003, the Albanian-Udi Christian community was officially registered by the state, following the restoration of the Kish Church in Sheki. Currently, the restoration of another church in the village of Nic in the Gabala region is ongoing.

## **1. The Safavid model of tolerance**

In a period of religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, the officials of the Safavid Empire were distinguished by their tolerant behavior towards the Christians who came to the country. This tolerance manifested itself in open debates between Christian missionaries and Muslim clerics and in the behavior of the shahs when receiving delegations.

Interest in the Safavids, which are considered an exotic country for European countries, can be seen in travelogues that have been translated and printed many times. Within this European network, France represents the main hub for the translation of these texts, almost all of which have an edition in French. Shah Abbas I was a popular figure in Europe and of course, travelers and missionaries made a great contribution to it. In 1631, Jean Baudoin translated Pietro Della Valle's travel account with the name 'Histoire

apologétique d'Abbas, roy de Perse'. In the introduction of the book author depicts the Safavid shah whose glory, strength of his spirit, and courage were admired from Tebriz to Baghdad.' Jean Baudoin put into words the portrait of a wise prince, a good politician, and a formidable warlord whose personality and charisma make him the perfect embodiment of the modern prince (Baudoin, 1631, p.4) .

For instance, 'the commentaries of D. Garcías de Silva Figueroa' was translated by Abraham de Wicqfort in 1667 from an incomplete Spanish manuscript ( Mokhberi, 2019, p.27). The most famous works on the Safavid Empire were reprinted up to fourteen times, for example, 'Viaggi' by Pietro della Valle or 'Relation between Muscovy and Persia' by Adam Olearius, published fourteen times between 1647 and 1727 in five languages. The first volume of Jean Chardin's travelogue was released in 1686 and published nine times before being included in the complete version of his work. As for the whole volume, it was issued eleven times since 1711. The Six Voyages of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier was also a great success, with ten editions and reprints between 1676 and 1724.

The authors of these works address a specific audience, which does not represent a specific social group, but rather a category of individuals who recognize themselves as sharing common values. According to Alain Viala, the readership in this period can be divided into three categories: the first unites readers of cheap collage works. The second included two to three thousand readers in France, who were recruited from among the "new scholars" of colleges, universities, and libraries, as well as humanists and secular people at court. Finally, the latter, at the end of the 17th century, covered eight to ten thousand people and included many nobles and cultured townspeople. It is this "wider" audience, including the last two categories, that travel reports are aimed at. Even A. Wicqfort supports the significance of this genre in the preface of the *L'Ambassade de D. Garcias de Silva Figueroa* "History has the advantage that it teaches much more effectively than philosophy, and entertains more pleasantly than the novel [...] but travel stories have the peculiarity that they are both incomparably better than history. Because, on the one hand, by seeing the customs and cities of different nations, we train our minds and acquire greater insight and prudence, on the other hand, we find more entertainment in relationships because we take part in the pleasure that fascinates travelers and what we do not have the endless dangers, fatigue, and inconveniences that accompany them (Wicqfort, 1667, p.16).

Not only did travelogues about the Safavids spread in France in the 17th century, but also the Safavid rulers were the theme of the painted portraits. The portraits of the Safavid shahs started painted with the codes or signs of the French kings which we can see from Balthasar Monkornet's portraits of Shah Abbas I and Shah Abbas II (fig.1). The inscription at the bottom of the painting of Shah Abbas II, which is in the collection of the National Library of France, reflects the heroic image of the Safavid ruler: 'Shah Abbas, the second named, King of Persia, great-grandson of that great king Shah Abbas, the menace of Ottoman arms, succeeded his father Shah Safi in 1642 to the Persian Empire, and three years later began the war against the Great Mughals, over whom he won great victories and made great conquests.

We can see similarities by comparing this portrait with the engraving of Robert Boissart depicting Henry IV (fig.2). It can be explained that Western symbolism showing absolute monarchy allows the French people to understand this country better. The engraving of Robert Boissart also has the aforementioned kind of inscription: Here is the brave Henry,

the French monarch, who has surrendered all the honor of the war. Nothing matters but you don't hear his voice when the noise of his realities fills the whole earth.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the concept of tolerance was seen as an essential and positive impetus against religious violation by both Protestant and Catholic authors. The logical debates in the second half of the seventeenth century were the particular indicator of tolerance. Catholic missionaries François Sanson, Alexander Rhodes, Fr. Bernard from Carmelites, and Capuchin friar Gabriel de Chinon proposed the Safavid tolerance model which the government demonstrated towards Christian minorities. In point of Fr. Sanson's view tolerance was a signification of the sovereignty of the Safavid shah: "He loves Christians and I don't want to worry about religion. He does not approve of the use of violence to make them Muslims. Besides he adds: He also is called by them '*Alam Pena*', which means '*the patronage and sanctuary of all nations*.' And this honorable name is given him with no ordinary justice; for that, none of all the Monarchs of *Asia* receives foreigners better, loves them sincerer, or permits them greater Privileges and Advantages than him. The King gifts the missionaries free training in their religion, a power to establish it where they please. And furthermore, the last mission recommended by the most Christian king has received an exemption from all taxes and *rents* wherever they arrive (Sanson,1695, p.52)."

We can see another example of the receptions of Christian envoys by the Safavid shahs in Carmelite missionary Paul Simon's report: "Nowadays, they have left all this [manners] and act towards them as they do towards their own people because the Shāh ('Abbās) demonstrates great regard to Christians, passes his time with them and places them at his table (Chick, 1939, p.157)."

Pietro della Valle also admits that there is harmony between confessions is entirely based on the equity of the monarch. All people live under the law regardless of their religion and customs: All foreign people regardless of country or belief live through ancient traditions and freedoms in their own way, under their own laws. Each nation is given its locality (as you have heard happens in Isfahan), where it lives apart, separated from the others. Furthermore, indeed in accordance with their own traditions, they create their own justice and practice jurisdiction as much in civil as in criminal issues and are disturbed little if at all by the rulers of other judiciaries. Meanwhile, this custom is followed: that not only peoples of various nationality but every person of quality, strangers who find themselves in Persia (such as the emissaries of princes, guests of the king, and so forth), enjoy the exact benefits and not only with regard to their own people and their own houses but also with regard all those who serve them in some way. Therefore it is that I know as Pietro della Valle guest of the king have jurisdiction to implement justice in my way whenever this is needed over all my people inside the house as well as outside and the Christians as well as Muslims and over constricting law (Della Valle,1990, p.130).

He clarifies the issue of tolerance not only in one part of his travelogue, but also in other parts with other examples, and it seems as if he is trying to attract the attention of European readers, especially the ruling class, with the issue of the possibility of religious freedom: the vizier said to me: our monarchs does not care greatly what belief his vassals follow; he likes to have people of all kinds; he adores them all equally; all faiths are good (so definitely do many Mohammedans believe as regards us Christians the Jews and themselves); (Della Valle,1990, p.152).

Guillaume de Vaumes called this feature of the Safavid elite curious nature in his research work about French missionaries (Vaumas, 1942, p.167). François de La Boullaye-Le-Gouz notes that during his stay he saw no antipathy towards Western envoys and missionaries and he admired the intellectual ease of the Safavid scholars and had pleasure from debates because of the same principles of philosophy and mathematics as the French do (La Boullaye-Le Gouz, 1653, p. 102).

He also attests that despite the Ottoman Empire travelers are seduced by the ease of formal or informal debates in the Safavid Empire. Therefore, controversial papers are being sent from European countries to help religious missionaries support this debate.

During this period descriptions of Safavid tolerance toward other religions contrast with French oppression of non-Catholic people. Chardin indirectly criticized the hostile attitude of Catholic France through his praise of the Safavids. We can relate it with that J. Chardin suffered French religious policy as a Protestant and desired restoration of faith unity. Chardin illustrated the plenty of coffeehouses at the center of social relations in seventeenth-century Isfahan in which, alongside chess games, and recitals of poetry and novels, mullahs would give speeches and dervishes talk of the vanity of materialism. Chardin revealed that "the sermons of mullahs or dervishes are moral speeches similar to ours, but it is not scandalous to ignore them. Eventually, there is here great freedom (Mokhberi, 2019, p.60)

It is not surprising that the works written about the Safavids influenced the French intellectuals as well, and their works used the Safavids as an example to fight against religious intolerance. For instance, Voltaire idealizes Safavid's tolerance in the Safavid coffeehouse description from Chardin's travel account: "there was no monarchical country where the rights of humanity were more enjoyed. We gathered in huge rooms called coffee houses, where some took this liquor, which has only been in use among us since the end of the seventeenth century; the others were playing, reading, or listening to storytellers, while at one end of the room, an ecclesiastic was preaching for some money, and at the other end those kinds of men who have made an art of amusement of others displayed all their talents (Chardin, 1711, p.56)." Chardin suffered personally as a Protestant from the annulment of the edict of Nantes which gave the Protestants permission to worship publicly but not in Paris and granted civil rights. It is seen that Chardin tried to show the Safavid Empire as a model for French *dévots* who pushed the state to establish coalitions with Catholic states, such as the Hapsburgs, and look to the Safavid Empire as an ally against the Ottomans. From the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, the *dévots* were at the height of their power, they were receptive to published sources from Catholic states, such as Portugal and the Italian kingdoms, that spread the image of the Safavid Empire as an ally of Christianity and called for a coalition with the Safavids against the Ottoman Empire.

Despite the failure of Augustinian missionaries in the Safavid lands the work of Fr. António de Gouveia was translated into French in 1609 with the name '*Histoire orientale des grans procès de l'église catholique* ' brought 'successful' missionary activity of the Augustinian missionaries to the attention of French Catholics. Another leaflet from 1586 is titled *Discours, De la bataille Nouvellement Perdue par le Turc, Contre le Roy de Perse: Ou il y a une remonstrance, à la Noblesse de la Chrestienté, & principalement a celle de France, pour l'inciter, de laisser leur guerre civile, affin de liuvrer au Turc ennemy Capital des Chrestiens* (*Discourse of the battle recently lost by the Turk against the king of Persia:*



*where there is a remonstrance to the Christian nobility, and principally to those of France, to incite them to end their civil war in order to deliver the capital of the Christians from the Turkish enemy)* states that the Safavids “defeated a significant number of the Ottoman troops” in the last battle fought, promoting the strength of Safavids as a possible ally (Gouvea, 1609,p12)

It seems from the sources that Shah Abbas I visited an Augustinian Church after it was established. In the work "Relação Verdadeira" (True Connection), which is a valuable source about the activities of the Augustinians in the territory of the Safavid Empire of Azerbaijan, it is described that in December 1608, Shah I Abbas visited the Augustinian church together with his courtiers: "The beautifully decorated floor was covered with carpets, and they burned various aromatic substances. There are various divine paintings on the altar of the church: illustrations of the Holy Mary, and Jesus - our savior. The church is equipped with an organ and other musical instruments. The choir sang local Portuguese music (Flannery, 2012, p.209)." The document stored in the National Archives of Portugal states that "the monastery was built three years before the fall of Hormuz". Although the exact location is not described, it is noted to be located near the royal palace. The Augustinian priests mention that the Safavid courtier Ali Bey informed them about Shah's visit to the church: 'A few years ago, it was forbidden for a Muslim to visit the church, and the Muslim man would be burned in the fire.' Now, not only they were allowed to enter the church, but the king himself set foot there and allowed the slaves to be freed and taken to Christian lands. There is information that the aforementioned Ali Bey later came to the church and delivered the Shah's decree. According to the decree, Muslims can convert to Christianity if they want, but on the condition that priests do not interfere with Christians who want to convert to Islam. In response, the missionaries said that they had no objection to the Shah's decree. But it could disappoint them to see Christians who have left their religion.

However, on the other side, the French Catholics viewed the Safavids through the lens of their own religious fight. The Safavids were seen as heretics who broke away from Ottoman Islam (like the Protestants) and it was a barrier for coalitions. An anonymous booklet discovered at the Bibliothèque Nationale, published in Angers in 1606, reveals that the fights between the French Catholics and the Protestants continued to color the ultra-Catholic group's interpretation of Ottoman Sunnism and Safavid Shiism into the seventeenth century: "It was Ismail himself who caused the Persian Empire to rebel and invade it around [1500] because he entered it by deceit, pretending to proclaim and preach the law of Muhammad, saying that hitherto it had been misunderstood (Mokhberi, 2019, p.40) Ismail seems as a heretic who moved away from the mainstream Islam of the Ottomans, disseminating a new faith; the analogy with the Protestants is obvious.

Let's draw attention to the fact that an advocate of the *dévot* party and one of Cardinal Richelieu's consulers was Joseph le Clerc du Tremblay, ordained as Father Joseph in 1604, who pushed for a pro-Catholic coalition with Spain and the Safavid Empire against the Ottoman Empire. He promoted the French interest in the East and pushed for a Christian crusade against the Ottomans 56 But during the Thirty Years' War France, under Richelieu decided to officially establish an alliance with the Ottomans, and Father Joseph's diplomatic efforts ended. He replaced the idea of military intervention with a missionary movement to both the Safavid Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Pacifique de



Provins's journey resulted in his *Relation du Voyage en Perse*; printed in 1631, it became the first main French work on the Safavid *Empire*.

## **1.2. Colonial Policy of the Russian Empire: Resettlement, Russification and Christianization**

One of the main directions of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in Azerbaijan at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was the resettlement policy. Russia organized the migration of non-Muslim populations in the occupied Muslim territories in order to strengthen its political power and increase the Christian element (Ilyasov, 2024).

The Russian authorities considered the Armenians especially close to themselves. General P.D. Sisianov noted that Armenians, being Christians, were loyal to the Russian government and wanted to see the Russian state dominate new territories. Within the framework of this strategy, 120 thousand Armenians from the Iranian and Ottoman states were resettled to the northern regions of Azerbaijan in 1828-1830.

By the beginning of the 20th century, this policy had changed the demographic balance. If at the beginning of the 19th century, Armenians constituted only 9% of the population of Northern Azerbaijan, by the beginning of the 20th century this figure had increased to 32.65%.

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The multicultural environment of Azerbaijan has long historical roots. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Azerbaijani people further developed their ethnic tolerance traditions. During this period, the enlightened intellectuals of Azerbaijan promoted the ideas of national unity and religious tolerance. Especially during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920), these values were formed as one of the main principles of state policy.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic ensured equal rights for all peoples living in the country and created conditions for their development of their national culture. Representatives of various ethnic and religious communities participated in the parliament. At that time, Azerbaijan was perceived as the common homeland not only of

Muslims, but also of Russians, Jews, Germans, Georgians and other peoples living in the country.

After the establishment of Soviet power (after 1920), the traditions of national and ethnic tolerance of Azerbaijan became an integral part of state policy. Although the Soviet government tried to weaken religious beliefs and spread atheism, national diversity and ethnic tolerance were preserved to a certain extent.

### **Azerbaijani Philanthropists and Their Educational Activities**

A number of philanthropists who played an important role in the history of Azerbaijan have rendered great services in preserving the multicultural environment of the country. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many wealthy Azerbaijanis contributed to the development of society by opening schools, libraries, and educational centers.

The most famous of these was Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. He opened the first Muslim girls' school in Baku, creating conditions for Muslim women to receive an education. This initiative was an important step towards gender equality and accessibility of education in society.

In addition, other philanthropists also contributed to the development of Azerbaijani society by building mosques, schools, and hospitals in the regions. Their activities served the development of social justice and humanism in the country.

### **The confessional policy of the Soviet Union.**

Although the concept of multiculturalism is perceived as a new term in modern times, these traditions have existed in Azerbaijan for centuries. Although they are called by different names, the essence has not changed.

In addition to the spiritual values of the people, the political leadership of the country also played a special role in the formation of Azerbaijan as a multicultural society. Based on this policy, the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions", adopted on October 20, 2005, was ratified by the Republic of Azerbaijan on November 26, 2009 (Fautre, 2014).

The Azerbaijani state carries out purposeful work to protect the culture, language and traditions of the minority peoples living in the country. Our state, which is based on the traditions of tolerance, cares equally for different religious and ethnic groups.

Among the activities carried out in Azerbaijan within the framework of the multiculturalism policy, institutions such as the Baku International Center for Multiculturalism and the Knowledge Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan play an important role.

According to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev: "Multiculturalism is a state policy in Azerbaijan. I must note that our historical past also dictates this. At the same time, multiculturalism is a way of life in Azerbaijan. We act on the basis of these principles in our daily lives."

The Azerbaijani government organizes international forums to preserve the traditions of tolerance in the country and develop the policy of multiculturalism. Since 2011, the

International Humanitarian Forum has been held annually, and influential politicians, scientists and cultural figures from around the world participate in these events.

These events make a significant contribution to the international recognition of the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism and the development of global dialogue.

The Bolsheviks, who seized power after the April coup, put an end to the democratic achievements of the People's Republic of Azerbaijan, the first secular democratic state in the East, which ruled the country for 23 months. This institution, which had a multicultural basis and combined components of both Western and Eastern models, gave all citizens of the state the freedom to live with equal rights, regardless of religion, language, race, or gender, and governed the country on the basis of democratic principles. In order to break the people's fighting spirit, the Bolshevik dictatorship decided to strike a blow at their national spirit. On May 15, 1920, by decision of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Department of Transcaucasian Muslims, and the sheikh-ul-Islamic institution were abolished. In order to curb the religious views of the people, the "Materialists' Club" was organized in 1923. By decision of January 24, 1924, the "Special Commission Against Religion" was established. And the further development of this decision finds itself in the "Society of Godless People". In 1929, the name of this society was transformed and renamed "Society of Fighting Godless People". The Bolsheviks were not content with creating societies directed against religion alone in order to separate the people from their historical roots. In the late 1920s of the 20th century, the ruling structures, which had openly fought against religion, closed 120 mosques in the regions of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1929 alone, and in general, 400 mosques were closed in the Azerbaijan SSR for 1930 (Fautre, 2014).

Baku continued to approach multicultural culture at the beginning of the 20th century. Although it bore the brunt of Russia's colonial policy, Northern Azerbaijan, which had entered the stage of development of capitalism, became acquainted with the values of Western culture, the country, which was the bearer of Eastern civilization, enriched its spirituality and approached the multicultural world. It was during this period that a new era of painting, realistic paintings emerged as a result of the influence of Russian and European cultural and social trends. Azim Azimzadeh was the founder of the Azerbaijani school of caricature and satirical painting.

During this period, theater buildings, cinemas and entertainment centers also increased in Baku. The construction of the first national theater building in Azerbaijan is associated with the name of Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. The theater building was built in 1883 based on the project of architect Kognovitsky. The theater played an important role in the development of multiculturalism in the country.

Within the framework of the confessional policy of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks intensified the fight against religion in Azerbaijan in 1920. In 1923, the "Materialists' Club" was created, and in 1929 this club was renamed the "Society of Fighting Godless People". The Bolsheviks took such measures in order to separate the people from their religious and historical roots.

The development of multiculturalism and the preservation of ethnic and religious tolerance of the Azerbaijani people continue to this day. The Azerbaijani state further strengthens its multiculturalism policy by holding international conferences and events.

## **2. Azerbaijan's Multicultural Policy in the Modern Era and Its Implementation in the Education Sector**

Although the concept of multiculturalism is perceived as a new term in modern times, these traditions have existed in Azerbaijan for centuries. Although they are called by different names, the essence has not changed.

In addition to the spiritual values of the people, the political leadership of the country also played a special role in the formation of Azerbaijan as a multicultural society. Based on this policy, the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions", adopted on October 20, 2005, was ratified by the Republic of Azerbaijan on November 26, 2009.

The Azerbaijani state carries out purposeful work to protect the culture, language and traditions of the minority peoples living in the country. Our state, which is based on the traditions of tolerance, cares equally for different religious and ethnic groups.

Among the activities carried out in Azerbaijan within the framework of the multiculturalism policy, institutions such as the Baku International Center for Multiculturalism and the Knowledge Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan play an important role.

According to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev: "Multiculturalism is a state policy in Azerbaijan. I must note that our historical past also dictates this. At the same time, multiculturalism is a way of life in Azerbaijan. We act on the basis of these principles in our daily lives."

The Azerbaijani government organizes international forums to preserve the traditions of tolerance in the country and develop the policy of multiculturalism. Since 2011, the International Humanitarian Forum has been held annually, and influential politicians, scientists and cultural figures from around the world participate in these events.

These events make a significant contribution to the international recognition of the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism and the development of global dialogue.

Intercultural communication-related publications, almanacks, textbooks, and monographs are being published in numerous nations, including Azerbaijan. To guarantee that education and cultural professionals receive training in this area, specific measures are being made. Through its many forms and levels, education in particular is essential to social adaptation and integration. It now plays a crucial role in maintaining both regional stability and national security. In addition to addressing injustice and inequality, education has the power to eradicate boundaries and preconceptions between ethnic groups (Namazova, 2017).

By promoting knowledge and awareness of various cultures, multicultural education helps people accept or at least tolerate them. Conversely, intercultural education promotes mutual understanding, respect, and communication amongst various cultural groups in order to create a dynamic and sustainable manner of coexisting in multicultural society (Lipstein, 1981).

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan's Knowledge Foundation's educational initiatives also place a high priority on promoting pluralism and culture. Pedagogical aspects are the main emphasis of these projects (Aghayev, 2015).

Understanding the role that education plays in fostering diversity, the Azerbaijani government now provides "Introduction to Multiculturalism" and "Azerbaijani Multiculturalism" courses at 15 internationally recognized institutions and 38 local universities. These courses' main goal is to give students a thorough grasp of Azerbaijan's multiculturalism policy, including its features and the factors that have

contributed to its effective execution. The lectures also examine the literary, philosophical, journalistic, political, and legal underpinnings of multiculturalism, its historical context, and the unique characteristics of the Azerbaijani multiculturalism model in contrast to other models now in use. These classes foresee possible future developments in the multicultural landscape while simultaneously emphasizing the need to regulate the nation's ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural variety and improve the multicultural environment generally (Namazova, 2017).

Teachers (sometimes known as "multicultural teachers") who teach and advocate for multiculturalism in multicultural cultures have a big role to play in maintaining social harmony, stability, and the preservation of cultural diversity, especially in the educational system. A "multicultural teacher" is someone who appreciates basic cultural values, tolerance, communication, and collaboration in their work and acknowledges the importance of culture in human existence. They exhibit respect and awareness for historical history and cultural variety, and they are dedicated to embracing social and cultural differences (Dilg, 1999). These educators work to protect cultural and national variety and actively promote cultural tolerance. Their responsibilities also include cultivating students' multicultural identities and assisting them in internalising the goals and tenets of multiculturalism.

The main duties of a "multicultural teacher" include:

- Recognising and embracing the diverse cultural identities of students;
- Developing diagnostic methodologies to evaluate tolerance and national-cultural diversity;
- Fostering an atmosphere of harmony, tolerance, and respect for differences in the classroom;
- Acknowledging the important role that collaboration between educators, parents, and society plays in addressing issues like violence, hatred, and discrimination;
- Critically reflecting on and overcoming one's own cultural biases and stereotypes;
- Helping students define their own identities;
- Encouraging critical and conscious thinking;
- Encouragement of creative conflict resolution as opposed to force-based approaches and teaching students these principles.

In this sense, diversity is essentially considered an essential part of a teacher's professional and personal competencies (Namazova, 2017). Since it allows teachers to engage in social processes within a multicultural society, facilitate intercultural interactions, integrate the multicultural dimension into their pedagogical tasks, and support students' multicultural education, multicultural competence is closely related to this idea. A teacher's proficiency with multicultural education technologies, knowledge and experience in multicultural education, effective communication skills with people of different nationalities, and a strong ethical position within the framework of multicultural education are all important markers of their multicultural competence.

Additionally, textbooks in the languages of the numerous ethnic groups residing in Azerbaijan are published by the Ministry of Science and Education. For example, textbooks for grades 1-4 were printed in Talish, Tsakhur, Haput, and Khinalug in 2023, and a Tat-language textbook is anticipated to be released this year.

Additionally, the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre publishes literary and scientific works in the languages of the various ethnic groups that call Azerbaijan home.

This approach facilitates the use of books as primary resources and advances intercultural education in the nation (Namazova, 2017).

We must implement innovations in every industry and take calculated measures towards a successful future due to the changes taking place in the globalising world. Education is the most important of these areas since it is the most effective means of influencing people's lives. Tolerance and respect for one another's moral and cultural values, as well as the capacity to listen intently to one another, are essential for a prosperous future (Ilyasov, 2024).

## **Methodology**

About the methodological basis of the research, we can say that the sources written about the period were studied, a critical attitude was shown to the sources, and an initial conclusion was reached. J. Watkins notes that the history of diplomacy is inextricably linked with the histories of visual art, literature, education, race, statehood, marriage, and behavior. During the research the previous periods were referred to, and a comparative analysis was carried out. This is due to the fact that most of the authors of the travelogues did not have relations with the palace or had a small number of meetings with state officials, the written information was based on what they heard and indirectly obtained facts rather than personal observation. While investigating the problem, books, monographs, and articles published in recent years were used. Moreover, I conducted research on paintings and tried to delve into the artistic characteristics and value of the works.

We also conducted a survey among students. Our survey consists of 14 questions and will be evaluated using a 5-point scale. The questions include:

- I am aware of my biases and understand how they affect my thinking.
- If I see someone being humiliated or discriminated against, I stand against it.
- I have a positive attitude toward people from different cultures supporting each other and building connections.
- I am interested in the ideas and beliefs of people who do not think or believe as I do, and even if I disagree with them, I respect their opinions.
- I am aware of the stereotypes that others create about my ethnic background.
- I understand that I am a product of my upbringing and believe that there are valid beliefs beyond my own.
- When communicating with others or making judgments about their skills and abilities, I do not consider physical characteristics.
- I strive to learn about and appreciate the richness of other cultures and respectfully acknowledge their celebrations and events.
- Even though it is different from my own religious beliefs, I visit places of worship belonging to other religions.
- Do religious traditions hinder integration in a multicultural society?



- How would you evaluate the role of social media in promoting religious tolerance today?
- How would you evaluate the role of social media in spreading religious intolerance today?
- Is the fight against ongoing religious radicalism effective in the modern era?
- Can Azerbaijan's model of tolerance be applied as a positive example in the global fight against religious intolerance?

We also used the interview method to interview Ravan Hasanov, the director of the Baku International Multiculturalism Center, and published it in the press.

## Results

As a result of both qualitative and quantitative methods, we reached several conclusions: The interview method showed that the level of discrimination and bias among the 60 students was not high. Seminars and meetings were held to reduce bias among the students.

The main objective of the study was to establish links between religious communities and the university, as well as to educate students about ethnic minorities. As part of this initiative, a seminar was organized with Robert Mobili, the head of the Albanian-Udi community. The seminar was attended by students and teachers of the faculties of political science and history, as well as the university administration. During the seminar, Robert Mobili provided information that “With the support of the government of Azerbaijan, the Church of the Apostle Elisha, located in the village of Kish in the Sheki region and considered the “mother of churches” in the Caucasus, was restored. In 2006, the official opening of the Albanian-Udi Church “Chotari” took place in the village of Nij in the Gabala region, where the Udis live compactly. In 2020, another historical church in Nij, the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, was thoroughly restored by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. The community leader emphasizes that monuments, especially those in the liberated territories that the Armenians tried to falsify, also require significant restoration: “The restoration of these monuments requires both time and financial resources. It is extremely important that both local and foreign tourists visit these places and learn about their history, since each of them is an integral part of the ancient Albanian cultural heritage.

The interview with Ravan Hasanov, the director of the Baku International Multiculturalism Center revealed some points:

- Mr. Ravan, first of all, we would like to get information about the directions of activity of the Baku International Multiculturalism Center, which you are the head of.

- The Center was established on May 15, 2014 by the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As we know, there are about 30 peoples with different languages, cultures, and religions living in Azerbaijan. After gaining independence, Azerbaijan began to protect these values as values, as well as turn them into a state policy. In particular, one of the main priorities of Heydar Aliyev was to form a model of governance of a multicultural society and to reflect this in the constitution, legislation, and political arena. Often, people think that multiculturalism is a matter of civilization. In countries like

Azerbaijan, multiculturalism, in addition to being a matter of culture, also raises the issue of security. Because it is located in a complex geography and, of course, there are many threats. These threats often do not come from within the country. They carry ideologies or influences from outside the country. One of the goals of the center, established in 2014, is to protect the various religions, cultures, and beliefs in Azerbaijan and to support their preservation. One of the goals of the center is to promote the rich multicultural traditions of Azerbaijan both inside and outside the country, to study, teach, compare, and prepare reports, and to promote the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian heritages of Azerbaijan. There are more than 150 churches in Azerbaijan. So why haven't these churches been destroyed? Our lands were occupied for 30 years, and all the mosques there were razed to the ground and destroyed. We are trying to make this comparison. Sometimes they say that the multiculturalism center is busy with everything. We have branches in 9 countries, and we have direct contracts with 26 world universities. We organize international winter and summer schools, and we are also engaged in the promotion of our cultural heritage.

- So how do you fight Islamophobia as a type of discrimination today?

- I divide the fight into two parts: local and global fight. Local fight, of course, your legislation must be fully consistent so that you can prevent the spread of hate speech and discrimination. Politics must also be consistent with this. Europe is as if afraid that Europe will be completely Islamized in 20 years and they consider this a threat to themselves. Islam is a belief system, a religion, and it affects both the radical and the believer. If you are fighting extremism, call it extremism, if you are fighting radicalism, call it radicalism. If you are fighting terrorism, it has a specific name - terrorism. But, you should not fight Islam. True, the issue of Islamophobia began to come to the agenda more with the UN General Assembly declaring March 15 as the "Day to Combat Islamophobia" in 2022. But this is an enlightenment. Because most of it is of a recommendatory nature. It is not interactive. When you read about religion-state relations, religion-law relations, you will see that the self-preservation instinct of all states is that they all claim that. We have national values, and global religious values clash with our national values. The state that can resolve this clash will be profitable. One of our questions was how have we ensured and protected the tradition of coexistence? You know how it is. Azerbaijan has always been multinational. This did not seem like an advantage to us before. But now we look at it and see that it is truly a wealth. We need to show this. This can become our calling card. It is becoming. We are one of the rare states in the world that this is supported. The Secretary General of France used to say that I am a Jew at home. And I am French outside. And the head of our Jewish community says that you don't have to worry, I am a Jew both at home and outside. In other words, there are specific details that explain everything. I do not intend to criticize Europe. But go to any civilized city in Europe, and armed men are standing in front of ordinary places of worship. But we come, when we cannot make it to the mosque for prayer, we can easily go and pray in the synagogue. We have not been able to demonstrate these things. But now we need to show it.

- One of our questions was how we have ensured and preserved the tradition of coexistence?

You know how it is. Azerbaijan has always been multinational. This did not seem like an advantage to us before. But now we see that this is truly a wealth. We need to show this. This can become our calling card. It is becoming. We are one of the rare states in the world that supports this. The Secretary General of France used to say that I am a Jew at home. And I am French abroad. And the head of our Jewish community says that you don't have to worry, I am a Jew both at home and abroad. In other words, there are specific details that explain everything. I do not intend to criticize Europe. But go to any civilized city in Europe, and armed men are standing in front of ordinary places of worship. And we come, when we cannot make it to the mosque for prayer time, we can easily enter and pray in the synagogue. We did not have the ability to demonstrate these things. But now we need to show it.

We would like to know how Azerbaijani legislation supports this?

Most of the norms of the Constitution adopted in 1995 are reflected in articles such as the right to equality, the right to use one's native language, the right to national identity, the right to preserve one's culture, the right to receive education in one's own language and to have media in one's own language, and the right to freedom of conscience. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has approved and ratified more than 50 conventions at the international level that are related to the protection of the rights of national minorities, ethnic peoples, and religious minorities. It has implemented all of them to the highest degree.

As a result of these meetings, we agreed with Baku International Multiculturalism Center that they will deliver free training on multiculturalism and tolerance to the teaching staff of WCU.

## **Conclusion**

Every region and country has its own unique multicultural values and traditions. Azerbaijan is committed to these traditions and has created the necessary socio-political conditions for the peaceful coexistence of national minorities settled on its territory and the protection of their ethnic and cultural values.

The idea of a "Safavid tolerate model" was initiated by Catholic missionaries and this model contributed to interreligious, intercultural relations. Studying the many people of different creeds, ethnic and national origins within one city, Herbert declared in the early 17th century that "in matters of conscience they question no one where there is no breach of the peace." Thévenot asserted that "the Persians grant complete freedom of conscience to all foreigners, whatever their religion." Dahoulrier-Deslandes's 1673 book *The Beauties of Persia* stated that "all these different peoples, notwithstanding their different religions, live together on friendly terms in Isfahan and have a system of justice that gives no preference to either Christians or Muslims."

Chardin stated that "the most commendable quality of the Persians is their kindness to strangers; the welcome and protection which they afford them, and their universal hospitality and tolerance towards religion." Chardin pointed out that "their religious principles [...] [permitted] all forms of worship", although he also pointed out that the supposedly "universal" support for tolerance excluded their "clergy", who, "as in all other places, hate to a vehement degree, all those who differ from their opinions." (Masroori, 2021,p.62)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the prominent ethnographer, Valiyev (Baharli), showed that Azerbaijan is an ethnographic museum. Currently, more than 80 minority peoples live in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. These minority peoples belong to Caucasian-speaking, Iranian-speaking, Turkic-speaking groups and are included in the ethno-confessional composition of the country's population. Among them, we can mention the Udis, Ingiloy, Khinalig, Kyrgyz, Budugs, Tats, Talysh, Russians, Lezgins, Jews and others. Some of these minority peoples are the original inhabitants of Azerbaijan, while others settled in the country's lands as a result of socio-political processes that occurred at different stages of history.

In a world full of diversity, it is crucial for the younger generation to cultivate inclusivity and cultural understanding in order to promote world peace. To foster cultural exchanges and mutual learning it could be better to take positive examples from history like the Safavid tolerance model. To build a better world, with deep research on these models, with visual and textual pieces of evidence, we can promote equality between religions and promote multicultural society. and intercultural research programs can break down stereotypes, build empathy, and promote a sense of unity among diverse communities.

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