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## **Creativity of Ashugs: An Investigation on Ashug Culture in Azerbaijan**

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### **Abstract**

Ashug art forming one of the fundamental, private branches of Azerbaijan folklore is the actual problem of modern folklore-study investigating ashug sphere, schools and artisans. Ashug is the event of folk activity existing in ancient times with different names. In the structure of this tradition the important historical layers of the folk culture as the ancient cult, belief, art find its reflection. Shirvan is one of the ancient culture centers which has its own historical evolution and development stages. Shirvan had historical relations with the developed cultural states of the ancient world and was acquainted with main achievements of East and West culture. Azerbaijan ashug poem of the 19th century was significant with the important event. The performance style of woman masters appeared in ashug activity. For the first time this tradition showed itself in Shirvan, then it spread in other ashug spheres. The woman ashugs in Shirvan had different characters than other ashugs. They were the masters displaying interest to the folk poem, knowing the classic style, creating gazal and gasidas in Aruz meter (classical poetic meter in oriental poetry) and writing some poems in such style. Shirvan sphere and Shirvan ashug activity saving the richest examples of Azerbaijan culture and folklore, at the same time different ashug masters of Shirvan region haven't been the system subject of the investigation. We can meet the thoughts and considerations about Shirvan folklore sphere and the life of different ashugs in the limited works. But in the new period the place and the role of ashug in the ashug culture and folklore tradition haven't been cleared up.

**Keywords:** Shirvan, Folklore, Ashug, Azerbaijan.

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## Introduction

Ashug art forming one of the fundamental, private branches of Azerbaijan folklore is the actual problem of modern folklore-study investigating ashug sphere, schools and artisans. It is known from the investigations that world nations have their own traditional folklore and many nations have special kinds of the teller. Being the users of historical memory they take special part in creation, living and carrying of folklore. As special creators and alive memory of folklore they have always been in the attention of the definite science branch. In modern period when the scientific-technical progress, global integration processes are increased in speed it is important to study, to note and to save the ancient spiritual heritage and national-cultural traditions of the professional tellers who have the special folklore memory. Because folklore is not used directly and actively in the life of people as it was in old times, now it is used in different forms. In some ceremonies folklore traditions are saved in conservative form, the teller fellows of folklore can introduce their memories the wide circles in such places and in situations. In Azerbaijan folklore such specific folklore kinds are the ashugs. Ashug is the cultural event which stands in the center of Azerbaijan folklore, generally in the center of the culture. Many elements of the culture combines in it and finds the possibility of going to the future (Sayilov, 2007). Ashug is the event of folk activity existing in ancient times with different names. In the structure of this tradition the important historical layers of the folk culture as the ancient cult, belief, art find its reflection. That is why ashug activity is the difficult folklore event.

## Methodology

Investigation of ashug activity either the historical specification in diachronic form or the modern position in synchronous form defines the actual problems of elucidating the necessary aspects of the great national-spiritual values system. There are some investigations about the genesis of ashug art by M.F. Koprulu, A. Jaferoglu, B. Chobanzade, M.H. Tahmasib, P. Afandiyev, M. Hakimov, A. Nabiyev, S. Pashayev, H. Ismayilov and others. There are also investigations about the contemporary position of this art by U. Hajibeyov, H. Arasli, M. Ibrahimov, A. Akhundov. A. Mirza and others. All investigations help to clear up the different directions of ashug activity. But adjoining with it some problems which are not the part of these investigations also wait their studying. One of these problems is investigation of the modern ashug sphere. In Azerbaijan folklore-study in order to study the ashug schools and spheres the first steps have been taken. The scientific investigations such as "Azerbaijan ashug schools" (Baku, 2004) by A. Nabiyev and A. Mirza's works about studying Azerbaijan ashug activity in a new direction are attracted. One can add here the investigations about Goycha and Borchali ashug spheres. Shirvan sphere and Shirvan ashug activity saving the richest examples of Azerbaijan culture and folklore, at the same time different ashug masters of Shirvan region haven't been the system subject of the investigation. We can meet the thoughts and considerations about Shirvan folklore sphere and the life of different ashugs in the limited works. But in the new period the place and the role of ashug in the ashug culture and folklore tradition haven't been cleared up. Especially it belongs to the ashug activity of Soviet period. It is important to analyze to definite the relations and attitudes of traditions and reality due to the modern specification of the art.

In the theoretical thought the conceptions of "school", "literary school" or "ashug school" have been created recently. Sometimes the conception of "literary school" is understood as a literary flow. In fact both of them are accepted as "the creative unity of writers having the alike ideology, outlook, aesthetic principles, method of reflecting" (Nabiyev, 2004: 139). It appears in the idea-literary peculiarities – subject, topic and choosing of heroes, in the characters of literary expression means and language of the same activity (Nabiyev, 2004: 139). "The irritable school" surrounding some general ideas is used in order to differ different outlook and thoughts, act styles, the philosophical thought and view categories which directs to art and some other points of literary activity.

## Discussion

One of the disputed matters in the science is about the woman ashugs. A group of scientists refuting the women being as ashug explain their thoughts as the ashug was the member of sect and the mystic. But other scientists also mention that women played and told poems on music. But if we consider that there were woman ashugs in the history and they wrote and played with men ashugs, even there were "deyishme" (a kind of poem composed by ashugs) competitions among them. Now in modern Azerbaijan ashug art, there are also woman ashugs.

The first group of scientists note that ashugs are the members of sects, but only men were in the sects, the women were prohibited to join sects. The people developing that thought show that the attitude of Islam religion is not positive and they are against women becoming ashugs. The shown facts are right, but in Azerbaijan ashug art there were woman ashugs and their books, activity have been investigated.

For the first time poetesses and woman ashugs were lightened in the press by Hasan bay Zardaby. But it was not met good by relatives of poetesses and woman ashugs. During the Soviet periods this problem was investigated and published by the poetess Nigar Rafibeyli (Mumtaz, 1927). Azerbaijan woman has her own fame and honorable place in the heroic pages of our history. The mother nursing the brave Bugaj who was the hero in the epos "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud", Nigar who was the devoted lover of Koroglu, Hajar who was the brave companion-in-arms of Gachag Nabi are the prides of our native land. Erecting a monument in Baku to the honor of a proud girl our poetical nation has named the magnificent corners of our native land with such names – the pasture Gizbenevshe (Violet girl), the spring Girxgiz (Forty girls), the rock Gelin (Bride).

In the past of our nation there was a queen Nushabe, the leader of the rebellion Rustama, the provident statesmen Sara Khatun, Tuti Bike and so on... But there were also seas full of with the tears of women, sky covered with moan, the hearts broken from the elegy.

The area Shirvan has the special place among the Azerbaijan poetesses and asug women. Because Shirvan has about two hundred years of state history. Existing of many cultures here shows its authority among world states.

Such merry, capricious quatrains belong to Parnaz the poetess of Shirvan. She was the witness of the earthquake which took part in 1902 in Shamaki and she devoted the effective hemistiches to that natural calamity.

They say that, "Joy and sorrow are twins", "One eye laughs, but the other cries". Azerbaijan woman ashugs had laughy eyes and lucky hours. But their eyes were full of blood and tears, their sorrowful months, years were more than their lucky days and hours. That is why in such poetical chronicle of femininity are heard screams. Poetesses mourn for the earthquakes, pillages, wars, slaughters, deads, losts and cry for the general bitter fortune of the eastern woman - deprived of civil rights, inequality, obedience. At the same time each poetess, each woman has her own wound, grief, loss.

Shirvan is one of the ancient culture centers which has its own historical evolution and development stages. Shirvan had historical relations with the developed cultural states of the ancient world and was acquainted with main achievements of East and West culture (Nabiyev, 2004: 281). It is unforgettable as a historical truth to destroy the ancient cultures in these areas, to end the whole national, material and spiritual cultural examples including ozan activity in the new social-historical condition by Arabic conquerors (Jafarzade, 1991: 176).

Professor M.H. Tahmasib wrote that not having any example from the 5th-7th century literary history it didn't mean that during those periods the square of our literary thought were without words and literary-

artistic traditions, vice versa during those centuries the best examples of our artistic word were created and spread, simply they weren't reached till our days (Tahmasib, 1978: 25). This truth is proved not only by some Arabic historical sources, but also by the literary-artistic sources informing about our ancient culture. It is known from the work "Divani-lugat-it-turk" by M. Gashgari that in the 11th century the perfect forms of our oral poetry, for example, proverbs, sayings, goshma, gerayli (the poem forms) and others were the everyday expressions in the language (Nabiyev, 2004: 232). F. Koprulu showed that in the 8th-11th centuries in Anatolia the masters of saz (an Azerbaijani folk musical instrument like guitar) had their mastership traditions (Nabiyev, 2004: 143). Trying to rich those considerations with new facts M.H. Tahmasib based on his logic wrote: "Some examples delivered till our days prove that, during Nasimi periods (it means in the 14th century) there were ceremony songs which were the products of our nation collective activity, the main kinds of epos activity, bayati, gerayli, goshma which were the folk poem also existed" (Tahmasib, 1978: 4). Lately the explained sources of Turk folk poem, especially the sources related with the origin history of the ashug mastery institute on the base of the ozan art once more affirms the correctness of these considerations (Mingazova, 2014: 253).

The ashug institution passed the new form stage in Anatolia literary sphere found the care in the short period. It gave echo related with some social-historical, political and sociological motives in near and faraway countries. The partial near and similar social condition to the Anatolia public life was also characteristic to the area of Shirvanshah state. The folk traditions created here show themselves as the decisive influence sources to the formation of oral and written branches of native language poems.

Beginning from the 11th century the poetry traditions began to the magnificent progress period in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan ashug poem of the 19th century was significant with the important event. The performance style of woman masters appeared in ashug activity. For the first time this tradition showed itself in Shirvan, then it spread in other ashug spheres. The woman ashugs in Shirvan had different characters than other ashugs. They were the masters displaying interest to the folk poem, knowing the classic style, creating gazal and gasidas in Aruz meter (classical poetic meter in oriental poetry) and writing some poems in such style. It mustn't be true to belong all of them to the rank of the ashugs. From the beginning of the 18th century in Shirvan these masters wrote poems in classic meter, but later that style began to cross with the ashug poem. The writing traditions began to expand in two style at the beginning of the 19th century. This tradition showed itself in the writings of Govhar Shirvani, Gullubeyim, Minabeyim and others. From the second half of the 19th century the influence of the same masters was shown in the formation of woman ashug who wrote in style of ashug poems.

**Govhar Shirvani (1810-1856)** was one of the famous woman-masters writing in ashug poem forms. Govhar Shirvani showed in some investigations as a folk poetess was the master who spread the folk poem style in the 19th century. During that period for Shirvan literary sphere it was against the classic style and it was being spread more widely. In the activity of Govhar Shirvani the appeal to the historical events connected with the failure of Shirvanshah is very impressive. Remembering the bloody history of Shirvan she tried to show its strained days and call the folk masters not to forget their history. In her literary works representing complaints from own life the characteristic subjects for the woman activity – regret, grief, to be married with force, the worried life in husband's house were represented and so the subjects showing the national life in Shirvan ashug poem were put into words.

Such motives shown in Govhar's activity were traditional for the activity of the 19th century woman ashugs. These subjects also showed themselves in the activities of Khavar and Khadija Shirvanies, Pustabeyim, Minabeyim, Shirinbeyim and others who wrote in the style of folk poem.

**Gullubeyim (1820-1876).** There is a need to notice about two famous woman masters who wrote in ashug poem forms in Shirvan in that period. One of them is Gullubeyim (1820-1876). She was born in the family

of the rich merchant in Shamakhi, had the best religious and secularized education, mastered the classical poem profoundly. She had gone to Halab, Iraq with her father and studied there, but when her father died in 1855 she returned to Shamakhi, opened there a school with three classes and taught the secularized sciences, including astronomy, theology. That school worked more than fifteen years in Shamakhi. Gullybeyim wrote poems in classical form too. In her activity folk poem forms were more, many of them had delivered till our days. Except the published poems we have five goshmas and three geraylis by Gullubeyim. These examples show she had any difficulties and her husband was sent into exile as she had opened the school and she was prohibited to teach. Confessors of Shamakhi gave judgments against Gullubeyim. The master had shown such hard circumstances in her poems where dissatisfactions about the period were represented.

The main dissatisfaction of Gullubeyim was from religious men and statesmen. In her protest one can see the grief of hard life, the protest to unjust decrees. The other valuable point of this master's activity is to cross with ashug poem and to show the main influence to the forming of the ashug activity.

**Minabeyim (1867-1895)** had also a role in the formation of woman ashug activity tradition. She was the first woman ashug in Shirvan who showed the protest for joining her love and fought against the cruel world injustice. Though she tried to join her lover who was her cousin, but Shamakhi religious sphere didn't allow it and Minabeyim had sacrificed herself for her love.

In the activity of Minabeyim the repetition of classic traditions of Shirvan ashug school shows itself. The ashug having the grumble from her luckless love (she can be almost called so) brings the God's love to her repertoire and glorifies the mystic outlook in the poems.

The new branch of the ashug activity – the woman ashug activity was established in the personage of Minabeyim, lately in Shirvan and in other ashug spheres the new form continuation of the woman ashug activity tradition founded at the beginning of the 18th century by Dostubeyim was the source of masters as Ashug Pari, Ashug Basti.

**Govhar or the poetesses with the name "Govhar"**. The memoirist Mahammadali Tarbiyat had written only the followings: "She is from Azerbaijan, these two and three distiches belong to her". But in the sources we met some distiches and quatrains with the name Govhar. One of them is the aunt of our well-known poetess Natavan, the sister of Agabeyim aga, Ibrahim khan's daughter Govhar aga. She had known the Persian and Azerbaijan languages very well, as the many relatives of Natavan sometimes had told poems by heart.

**Mohtab khanum**. We have only one poem by her. We can only tell that she was the modern of Mah khanum. She had lived and had her activity in Shaki in the 19th century. Her quatrains are in the optimistic spirit. It was written as an answer to her friend Mahtab khanum. This poem was in the style of ashug poem.

**Fatma khanum**. The short information about Fatma Shirvanli is given in the journal of Azerbaijan woman ashugs and folk poets. Fatma lived in the region Kurdamir in the 19th century and she was in the religious sect "Nagshibandi". We were interested in the personality of Fatma Shirvanli and got the following information after a long investigation.

Fatma Shirvanli's correct name is Fatma Beyim. She is the daughter of Mahammad Huseyn khan Mushtag who was the khan of Shaki during twenty years and the sister of the last Shaki khan Salim khan. She was born in 1770 in Shaki. According to the historical information after her father's death approximately in 1801 she married with Mustafa khan (1763-1844) who was the khan of Shirvan and the son of Agasi khan, till 1810 they lived in New and Old Shamakhi and Fitdag cities in the center of Shirvan khanate. As she didn't have a child more than ten years and in 1810 she was divorced from her husband Mustafa khan and

wanted to return to Shaki. Mustafa khan didn't want to divorce her but as she was very persistent he agreed and told that she would be in his protection. Mustafa khan informed that refusing the family life she began to pray. She accepted the way of Ismayil Afandi Sirajeddin Shirvani who was the chief of the sect "Nagshibandi". Ismayil Afandi (1782-1848) was from the region Kurdamir and lived there. Mustafa khan satisfied Fatma Beyim to live in Kurdamir. So, divorcing Mustafa khan presented the region Kurdamir and his properties in those areas to Fatma Beyim. He constructed a beautiful house for her and provided her as an owner with all possibilities and conditions. In 1820 when khanate rule-government was cancelled in Shirvan in the same year on the 19th of August Mustafa khan with his family and three hundred of people had to leave Shirvan. But Fatma Beyim didn't go with him and continued to live in Kurdamir.

Fatma Beyim was very clever, provident and religious. She was an educated and literate noblewoman. During the short time in that area either among the population or among the ruling circles she had got respect and authority. At the same time she took an active part in the meetings of Ismayil Afandi. In 1813 Ismayil Afandi went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. But his return lasted about four years. After his pilgrimage Haji Ismayil Afandi Sirajeddin Shirvani had lessons from the religious scientists of the sect "Nagshibendi" in Istanbul, Bagdad, Basra, Suleymaniyya, improved his religious science and knowledge, and he got the right to teach the sect in Shirvan and returned to the native land in 1817.

From the contest it is known that the poem by Fatma Beyim introduced to the readers was devoted to Haji Ismayil Afandi and it was written when he was in the pilgrimage.

Till 1820 without any obstacles Haji Ismayil Afandi continued his religious activity in Shirvan. But after 1820 it means when the khanate was cancelled the pressure and persecution began against Haji Ismayil Afandi. The Tsar government had definite for itself that the ideologist, leader of the movement "Muridizm" in Dagestan inspirer is Haji Ismayil Afandi who lived in Kurdamir. That is why the order was given to the Caucasian delegate to send Haji to the exile to Siberia. Hearing that news Fatma Beyim went to prince Medetov to ask not to send Haji to exile. She guaranteed that he wouldn't show any activity against the government. Her request was accepted with a special term by Medetov.

Fatma Beyim died in 1825 in Kurdamir. She was buried in the cemetery called "Yeddi gunbez" in Shamakhi in Mustafa khan's initiative. All her property was passed to the state treasury. After a year in 1826 Haji Ismayil Afandi left Shirvan. In 1848 he died in Amasya in Turkey and was buried in the cemetery Shamlar near Amasya. Now this grave and tomb is still in Amasya and it is the oath and pilgrimage place of people.

The sincerity, fragility, sweetness in the poem show that it was not the only poem of the poetess. May be somewhere there will be nice and interesting poems by her. The winds of the time will rise and will winnow these dust, mist layers and many art works by Fatma Beyim Shirvanli will appear.

**Parnaz khanum.** Parnaz Azay gizi was born about 1860-1862 in the village of Bagirli in Shamakhi region in the family of nomad. Her father Azay also had written poems with the pseudonym Dovgachi oglu.

She knew the art of carpet-making very well and was known with the tender ornaments on the carpets. She was famous for her quatrains, poems, consummate skills and was loved by everybody.

In 1902 when the earthquake happened in Shamakhi she was a guest in the family of Agakerim Garayev who was the father the well-known revolutioner Aliheydar Garayev. She had seen the horror and had written some quatrains. The intellectuals from her generation told that Parnaz was uneducated, but she had told poems and quatrains by heart. She lived very long and died about one hundred six years in her native country. Her grave is in Bagirle cemetery near her father – Azay Dovgachi oglu's grave.

**Zeynab Zarbali gizi.** Zeynab Zarbali gizi was born about 1860-1862 in the village of Kolani in Shirvan area in the family of Goran, she was grown up near her grandfather, the poet Churuk Islam and had learnt the rules of poems from him. Zeynab loved her father's sphered Ismayil, but was not allowed to marry to him and she had written the poem "Ismayil". She had written poems and quatrains about her grandfather's death, the infectious cholera, injustice and oppression, World War II and etc. She had three sons and a daughter. Zeynab died nearly eighty or eighty five years in 1942 and was buried in the cemetery Dag-Kolani in Kudru Duzu.

**Pusta Shikar gizi** was born about 1860 in the village of Tekle in Shirvan area in the family of Muradli. She had the life of nomad. She was married when she was thirteen years old. She had very hard life and her three children had died, the last one had returned from the war as a war cripple. Pusta died in 1947 in the village of Muskurlu in Goychay region and was buried in the cemetery of Islambaba.

**Agjagiz Dadash gizi.** Agjagiz Kerbelayi Dadash gizi Imanova was born in the beginning of the 80th years of the 19th century in the village of Hajimanli in the region of Neftchala and died in the 1974 in the same village. Her origin was from Shirvan area, in the 19th century when the earthquake happened their village was moved to the region Neftchala. Agjagiz was famous for her quatrains and poems. Her quatrains are told nowadays too. She had began her marriage in her fourteen years. Agjagiz was very capable, she had knit different carpets, stockings, stucco molding and ornaments.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, Azerbaijan ashug poem of the 19th century was significant with the appearing of the performance style of woman masters in ashug activity. For the first time this tradition showed itself in Shirvan, then it spread in other ashug spheres. There is a variety of considerations about Shirvan folklore sphere and the life of different ashugs in the limited works. However, in the new period the role of ashug in the ashug culture and folklore tradition haven't been cleared up.

The poetical heritage of the woman folk poetesses and ashugs being the famous and capable personalities of Azerbaijan ashug poetry has not been collected yet. The collected examples attract the sincerity, vitality and melancholy of activity of woman ashugs and folk poetesses.

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