

## Azerbaijani Identity in the Literary Thought of the Republic

Vugar Teymurkhanli

Doctor of Philosophy in Philology, Senior Lecturer, Guba Branch of Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2597-4015>

**ABSTRACT:** The article examines the concept of Azerbaijaniism (Turkism, Islamism, Modernism) in the literature of the Republic period. It is demonstrated that the establishment of the state left a noticeable impact on artistic thought, leading to the rise of a national spirit. During this period, literary imagination encountered a new direction. As a result, the ideas of Azerbaijaniism that had emerged in the literary and socio-political thought of the early twentieth century paved the way for the establishment of the Republic. After the newly founded state was officially named “Azerbaijan,” the literary imagination increasingly celebrated the nation and its just cause. M. Hadi’s creative work during the Republic era represents a new stage, as the poet glorified the independence and sovereignty achieved by Azerbaijan. In A. Shaig’s works as well, Turkism, Turanism, national identity, and Azerbaijaniism acquired a renewed direction. In the literary output of poets such as Davud, Zulfugar Bey, and Ali Kami, the national symbols and attributes of the Azerbaijani state were praised. All these factors indicate that, during the Republic period, Azerbaijaniism became focused on the Republic itself, reflecting the determination of the people and the nation to protect their homeland, freedom, and independence.

**KEYWORDS:** Azerbaijaniness, Literary thought, Poetry, Praise, Republic.

### INTRODUCTION

The ideas of Azerbaijaniism that emerged in the literary and socio-political thought of the early twentieth century, under the influence of historical circumstances, ultimately led to the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The fact that the new state was named “Azerbaijan” was by no means accidental; rather, it reflected the renewed manifestation of historical reality. This carried significant historical importance. First of all, the Republic was established on only a part of the historical Azerbaijani lands, while a large portion of these territories remained outside its borders. Therefore, the adoption of the name “Azerbaijan” essentially expressed a historical truth.

Historical facts—along with the widespread use of the term “Azerbaijan” from the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially in the early twentieth century—strengthened the conviction that this name was accurate. With the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the name “Azerbaijan” became firmly consolidated both in public-political thought and in the consciousness of the people.

This study aims to analyse how Azerbaijaniism was reflected in the literature of the ADR period and how poets contributed to the formation of national identity in 1918–1920. The research asks: **How did literary works shape and strengthen the national consciousness of the newly established Republic?**

### METHODS

This study uses qualitative textual analysis. The poems and literary works of Mammad Hadi, Abdulla Shaig, Davud, Zulfugar Bey, Ali Kami and other writers of the 1918–1920 period were analysed through discourse analysis and poetic-semantic analysis.

Historical documents, parliamentary materials, early 20th-century newspapers, and memoir-based sources were examined comparatively. The methodological goal is to identify ideological, thematic and symbolic markers of Azerbaijaniism expressed in Republic-era literature.

### RESULTS

The ideas of Azerbaijaniism that emerged in the literary and socio-political thought of the early twentieth century, under the influence of historical circumstances, ultimately led to the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The fact that the new state was named “Azerbaijan” was by no means accidental; rather, it reflected the renewed manifestation of historical reality.

This carried significant historical importance. First of all, the Republic was established on only a part of the historical Azerbaijani lands, while a large portion of these territories remained outside its borders. Therefore, the adoption of the name “Azerbaijan” essentially expressed a historical truth. Those who rejected this reality approached the issue ambiguously and opposed the use of this name. For this reason, the naming of the Republic as Azerbaijan was met with objections by several foreign states, particularly by the government of Iran.

However, historical facts—along with the widespread use of the term “Azerbaijan” from the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially in the early twentieth century—strengthened the conviction that this name was accurate, and consequently the Republic was officially given the name “Azerbaijan.” In his work *History of the Literature of the Turks of Azerbaijan*, Amin Abid wrote:

“The designation of our government with the term ‘Azerbaijan’ and referring to ourselves as ‘Azerbaijani’ or ‘Azeri’ has served as a compelling argument for those who construct such judgments. For the same reason, under the influence of similar reasoning, there were also those who, by including under our domain the ‘non-Azerbaijanis’ to whom the term ‘Azeri’ had only been applied figuratively for the Turks residing in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan, failed to prevent themselves from falling into misconceptions” (Abid, 2016, p. 28).

With the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the name “Azerbaijan” became firmly consolidated both in public-political thought and in the consciousness of the people. The designation of the state founded in 1918 as “Azerbaijan” on a historical and national basis was entirely justified. Although at the time certain opposing opinions were expressed, M. A. Rasulzade’s articles provided sufficiently comprehensive responses to the anti-Azerbaijani arguments.

With the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Seim, the delegates representing Azerbaijan issued a Declaration proclaiming the sovereignty of Azerbaijan as an independent state. The provisional government formed under the leadership of Fatahi Khan Khoyski accomplished significant work within a short period of time. At the ceremonial opening of the Azerbaijani Parliament (7 December 1918), M. A. Rasulzade, defending the autonomy of Azerbaijan, stated: “Thus, among the Muslim political parties there is no disagreement regarding the idea of Azerbaijan. The idea of Azerbaijan has already been firmly established in the consciousness of the people... Once raised, the flag shall never again be lowered!” (Rasulzade, 1918).

One of the first tasks of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the establishment of its state symbols: the adoption of the coat of arms, the anthem, and the national flag. In the decree on the State Language, it was stated: “Accepting the Turkish language as the state language and permitting the use of the Russian language in temporary government institutions.” The decree dated 27 June 1918, which affirmed Turkish as the state language and required its use in all courts and administrative bodies, was among the most important steps taken in the development of Azerbaijani national identity. Indeed, an immediate transition to the Turkish language was not feasible, as administrative correspondence was still conducted in Russian. However, until the officials heading these institutions learned the language, the use of Russian in government offices was temporarily permitted, and a transitional period was established. The language used in Parliament, however, was Azerbaijani Turkish, which held the status of the state language. Prof. N. Nasibzade writes: “When non-local parliamentary representatives proposed that speeches be delivered in Russian, the issue was specially discussed in one of the parliamentary sessions, and a decision was adopted. According to that decision, Azerbaijani Turkish was declared the official language of Parliament, while representatives of other nationalities were allowed to deliver their speeches in Russian” (Nasibzade, 1990, p. 61).

The decision of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic government on the “National Flag,” dated 9 November 1918, further strengthened the concept of Azerbaijaniism. Just as the adoption of the state language was significant, the acceptance of the national flag was equally important. The decree specified that the flag consisted of green, red, and blue colors, with a white crescent and an eight-pointed star. Within a short period, the establishment of Baku University and the development of science and education policies represented important steps toward advancing national consciousness. The delivery of the first lectures in Turkish at Baku University (15 November 1919) played a major role in the formation of national thought, scientific knowledge, and intellectual development. The recognition of Azerbaijan’s independence at the Paris Peace Conference further enhanced national consciousness and demonstrated the consolidation of statehood. This event was enthusiastically received in Azerbaijan and had a significant impact on the literary and social environment. Professor Bədirxan Ahmadli notes: “During the Republic period, the name Azerbaijan exerted its influence on both public-political and literary-artistic thought. Alongside the political life of the period, literary thought was directed toward the national fate of the people, individuals, and society. The close connection between national-political



thinking and literary-artistic thought with the national-historical destiny must be considered primarily in the context of the socio-political processes taking place globally, in Russia, and in the South Caucasus, which formed the foundation for the emergence of national awakening and the idea of independence in literary thought” (Ahmadov, 2015, p. 126).

The literary life of Azerbaijan during the Republic period was shaped precisely under the influence of this socio-political environment and became the expression of the aspirations and ideals of a people who had achieved national independence. For the first time in Azerbaijani history, literature and public life were so closely intertwined: writers, poets, publicists, and satirists contributed to the formation of the nation and the people through artistic expression. This process also included the nationalization of schools. All these measures made it necessary to unite the people around a single idea—an idea of patriotism, statehood, or Azerbaijaniism.

These national steps in the political sphere immediately influenced the literary process. Particular attention must be paid to poetry, which proved the most agile literary form. Poems praising the homeland, the flag, the language, the people, and the army emerged precisely at this time, reflecting a pressing societal need. In a very short period, Azerbaijani artistic thought began producing works that glorified statehood and its symbols, such as the national flag and army. Both the language and form of these works were new, and the national spirit they conveyed was exceptionally high. Within this body of celebratory literature, there were both elder writers and poets, as well as young intellectuals, all of whom lauded the newly established Azerbaijani state in their poems.

Professor Alkhan Bayramoglu, analyzing the literary process of the Republic period, draws the following accurate conclusion: “Our literary figures understood that one of the most effective means to instill the people with this spirit, to mobilize them for the consistent struggle for independence, and to convince them of their national-historical and moral right to achieve this goal, was to present the glorious path traversed by our ancestors as an example to the current generation” (Bayramoglu, 2003, p. 19).

Doğrudan da, uzun müddət öz keçmişindən ayrı düşmüş gənliyin həm keçmişini tanıması, həm də bu gün qazandığı müstəqilliyi təqdir etməsi ədəbiyyatın qarşısında duran milli vəzifələrdən biri idi. Bu dövrdə yaranan poetik nümunələrin bəzisi, olsun ki, sənətkarlıq baxımından mükəmməl olmasın, lakin bu şeirlərin təsir gücü, mənəvi-əxlaqi etkisi çox idi.

During the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the feelings of national liberation continued in the works of two prominent representatives of Romanticism: M. Hadi and A. Shaig. As in their earlier works, they defended Azerbaijaniism (Turkification, Islamization, Modernization), liberty, and independence. While in their previous poetry the future tense predominated, in their current poems the focus has shifted to the present. One of the most ardent poetic supporters of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the Romantic poet Mammad Hadi. In his poems such as *To the Azerbaijan State Youth* (1919), *To Our Soldiers and Volunteers* (1919), and *The Voice of Time and Life Itself* (1919), he condemned the massacres committed by Armenians in various regions of Azerbaijan (Baku, Guba, Shamakhi, Karabakh), commemorated the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the homeland, and glorified the nation’s attainment of national independence. Hadi regarded the preservation of independence as a primary concern and directed his attention to the soldiers and volunteers, calling on them to defend the homeland and safeguard its sovereignty. For the poet, “The honor of the nation expects more courage from you, // The state, the national victory, expects it from you.” It is clear that the poet fully understands how crucial the state and independence are for the people.

Victory awaits from you, our independence,  
Glorious honor, glorious courage, glorious determination calls.

Look upon our nation, pure and virtuous,  
With hope in their eyes, they seek your protection.

May the fields of our homeland be free from foes!  
Today, our land expects from you the highest bravery. (Hadi, 2005, p. 287)

For Mammad Hadi, all obstacles on the path to national independence and freedom must be overcome, and the people must take ownership of their sovereignty. As he writes: “Know that the beloved mother of the homeland is life itself, // Do not give her into the hands of the wicked, have mercy, she is sacred.” The poet affirms with certainty:

Our freedom is the radiant light of the world,  
See how beautiful it is, how alive, how young.



We will not give it up into the hands of enemies,  
Convince them by deeds of love for the homeland.

Come, let us be true to our purpose!

Come, let us sacrifice ourselves for the nation and the homeland! (Hadi, 2005, p. 290)

In Mammad Hadi's earlier poems, the ideas of freedom, national unity, liberty, and independence were already celebrated. During the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, this tendency becomes even more pronounced in his creativity; in the poems he wrote during the Republic period, the poet glorifies Turkism, struggle, and the national spirit. He wrote the poem "The Song of the Turk" (1918) in Ganja. Considering that at that time the government of the Republic itself was located there, it is clear that the poet's closeness to the Republic was not only ideological but also heartfelt and spiritual. In the poem, the struggle of the Turks during the First World War and the sacrifices they made are praised and presented as far from being in vain. The work emphasizes the idea of serving the nation on the path of national ideals, highlighting devotion and commendable commitment to the cause.

Are the bloods shed by the Turk all in vain?

Think carefully—are these sacrifices truly wasted?

In Mammad Hadi's poem "Towards the Victory of the District", military service is regarded as a great honor. This is because the soldier defends his homeland, preserves statehood, and upholds Turkism. The poet, considering being a soldier a noble duty, writes: "The brave one honors soldiering with zeal, // To be a soldier is a duty for every believer, as the Quran prescribes," thus emphasizing that Islamic thought also commends the people for defending their homeland.

To be a soldier is an honor—for the Turk, for Islam,

Through soldiering, keep the life of the nation shining with glory.

If we desire a life fully bright beneath the sun,  
Stand against any claim with courage and radiant valor.

The son of a Turk has always guarded his honor,  
With loyalty in deeds and faith in his words.

We fear no enemy, even if the world turns to fire,

At all times, we have defended ourselves with strength and skill. (Hadi, 2005, p. 205)

There were specific reasons why Azerbaijaniism in Mammad Hadi's work was expressed under various names. He consistently sought to articulate the thoughts of the people. Even in his poems written in the early 20th century, he promoted enlightenment, science, and education, calling his people toward these ideals. When the Republic was being established in Ganja, the poet felt it more closely and expressed the idea of independence poetically through various works. During this period, Mammad Hadi became one of the poets who most actively promoted the Republic. He was also among the first to write a poem about the liberation of Baku by the Turkish army on 15 September 1918. In his poem "To the Souls of the Martyrs of Our Freedom", he gives the highest value to those who sacrificed their lives for the homeland and liberty. He writes: "If such a grave should arise before me for the sake of my nation, // I would face it with a smiling countenance," thus honoring the martyrs and praising their ultimate sacrifice for the nation's cause.

Your grave is the heart of the nation,

These words spring from the truth within my heart.

My glorious nation will never forget you,

Believe it, O adornment of the world and of loyalty.

Through you, this nation found honorable independence,

Through you, this nation's life became full of hope.



In these days, all the people of the homeland cry out for you,  
This free nation greets you with respect. (Hadi, 2005, p. 297)

The poetic expression of Turkism reaches its highest level in the works of another prominent Romantic poet, A. Shaig. In his numerous poems, including “As the New Moon Rises”, “The Homeland’s Burning Voice”, “The Central Party of the Turkish Man”, “Dedicated to Equality”, and “From Aras to Turan”, he emphasizes the importance of the homeland and calls upon the people to defend it. It should also be noted that all these poems have a tone of exhortation and march-like rhythm, a form that fully reflected the character of the period. In his poem “Why Have You Delayed So Long”, he calls upon the forces coming to defend the homeland to take action without delay:

I am weary of waiting—ah, why are you so late?  
Have stones been left in your path? Or wild marauders?  
Does it not matter, whether they are stone, iron, or steel,  
With the steadfast, blazing fire in your heart,  
Burn them, melt them, extinguish, crush, strangle, tear,  
Show all your strength to the treacherous, vile enemies,  
Clear the way, come charging forth—for my heart longs for you so. (Shaiq, 2004, p. 45)

The subject and thematic focus of the poem “From Aras to Turan” is particularly interesting. In this work, the poet’s images—Aras, Turan, Kura, the Golden River, Lake Milk, and the Turkish emblem—are vividly personified. The events are poetically depicted as the roaring Aras, flowing from the foothills of Bingol (lake) with “lightning and eagle-like rocks,” traversing Turan and Iran, and finally reaching the Caucasus, where it reunites with its waiting brother, the Kura, gathering strength. The Aras hurries to Azerbaijan because treacherous hands have reached out to Turan’s beautiful lands, and the homeland is in danger. The poet will not allow that “the beloved, unique world beauty of the Great Turk // Should bleed or fall into the hands of strangers,” because millions of Turks in Turan would never permit this. The poet writes:

The beloved, unique world beauty of the Turk,  
Should it bleed, should a stranger’s hand embrace it?  
Would the hundred-million-strong Turks of Turan not rise against this?  
If they did not, would this treacherous hand not break our law?

Come, my brother, let me place my arm around your shoulder,  
Our mother, the “Sea of Ravens,” awaits and guards my path.  
Let us go, let us reveal our troubles to our mother,  
And let us scatter lightning across the homeland of the ancient Turk. (Shaiq, 2004, p. 26)

In his poem, known as “March” and titled “Dedicated to the Central Party of the Turkish Man – Musavat”, A. Shaig calls upon the people to unite in the homeland’s time of trial: “Let us unite, sons of Turks, for this path is the path of the nation, // Proclaim it, with honor and glory, for our history is full,” The poet urges the people and the nation to look to their past and, as they did before, to achieve victory again.

Let us march forward, come on, soldiers of the nation,  
Your past is full of glory and victory—let us not fall behind.  
Your eyes, like lightning, will make the enemy bleed,  
What business has a cowardly, vile traitor in this field?

Let us surge like the sea, advance like the waves,  
With the golden army ahead! Let us climb over mountains and rocks. (Shaiq, 2004, p. 21)

The establishment of the Republic opened a new chapter in artistic thought. New genres in poetry emerged, and a distinct form of celebratory or glorifying poetry developed. In the daily newspapers, new poems frequently depicted the Republic and its attributes. In 1919, the first poetic collection titled “Army Marches” was published. This collection compiled military marches related to the army, in which poets addressed the soldiers directly, calling upon them to defend the homeland. In many poems, the poets also addressed fathers and mothers, urging them not to hide their sons but to send them to protect the people. These poems



were quickly memorized by the public and had a significant influence within society. One such poem was Ali Kamin's "March". The poem is written from the perspective of a soldier. The young soldier, whose mother raised him and sent him to defend the homeland, experiences the emotions of serving the nation and conveys them to his peers. He declares: "My mother raised me and sent me to these lands, // She entrusted this banner to me and delivered me to God. // 'Do not sit idle,' she said, 'Strive, serve the homeland, // My milk will not be lawful to you if you do not confront the enemy,' through these lines, the soldier expresses the pride of serving the homeland. Here, the words "Mother" and "Homeland" can be interchanged without altering the meaning, as the mother symbolizes the homeland and vice versa. The essential point is that every citizen must recognize their sense of civic duty and do everything possible for the homeland.

Our pillow may be the stones of the homeland, our quilt the snow.  
If we turn back from this path, our honor would be lost!  
How beautiful it is to die for us, for the beloved homeland,  
Our hearts burn with love for the land, always, deeply within.

Marching above, marching ahead, glorious soldiers of the Caucasus,  
Marching above, marching ahead, the people of the Caucasus never turn back. (Army, 1996, p. 26)

F. Sajid dedicated his poem "The Address of the Turk" to A. Shaig. As one of the poets who wrote and created in Turkey, he was not indifferent to the socio-political developments taking place in Azerbaijan. Recalling the magnificent past of the Turks, the poet declares: "We know who we are! A nation of five thousand years! // Our names: Sky, Lightning, Iron, Rock, Mountain, Sea! // To India, China, Iran, we extend our reach everywhere! // Receiving signs from the heavens, we have traveled from East to West," in these lines, he expresses pride in his people's glorious history.

They say we are the companions of the sun, the breeze of the moon, the Turks!  
...Our flag was raised on the highest cliffs,  
Proud kings bowed before us.  
Undefeated forces yielded to our hands,  
Before our resolve, the world was not great!

They say we are the Turks, flowing from the mountains, toppling barriers! (Army, 1996, p. 27)

In his poems such as "Our Goal", "Soldier's Song", "An Address from a Soldier", and "To the Azerbaijani Army", Davud depicts the aspirations and desires of young people willing to die for an ideal. In "An Address from a Soldier", the soldier declares on behalf of himself: "I am going as a soldier, mother, why do you weep? // Why do you grieve my heart, mother? // I am standing guard with arms at the borders of my homeland, // I am a protector of my honor, my nation, and of you," through these lines, he presents himself as a devoted servant of the nation and asks his mother not to cry for him.

Thus, it can be observed that during the period of the Republic, the idea of Azerbaijani nationalism was primarily focused on the Republic itself, reflecting the determination of the people and the nation as a whole to defend their homeland, freedom, and independence.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the literary material shows that the ADR period created a new ideological and artistic environment in which Azerbaijaniism became the central concept of poetic expression. The themes of homeland, freedom, martyrdom, national unity, army and state symbols were used as tools to mobilize society.

Compared with earlier periods, the poetry of 1918–1920 was more political, more urgent and more focused on statehood. The works of Hadi and Shaig demonstrate that literature functioned not merely as art but as an instrument of national awakening. The findings are consistent with existing scholarship yet highlight more clearly the poetic strategies used to articulate Azerbaijani national identity. The main limitation of the study is the scarcity of surviving literary materials from the Republic era.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the literature of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic played a decisive role in shaping Azerbaijani national identity. Poets such as Mammad Hadi, Abdulla Shaig, Davud and others contributed directly to the strengthening of patriotic sentiment and the consolidation of national consciousness.



Republic-era poetry promoted values such as independence, statehood, unity and national pride, thus reflecting the ideological foundations of the newly established state. Azerbaijaniism during this period became inseparable from the idea of the Republic itself. Future research may investigate how these literary traditions influenced later stages of national ideology and post-ADR literary thought.

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