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## WOMEN AND ISLAM IN THE MEDIEVAL AZERBAIJAN

**Abstract.** Islamisation, changing all spheres of public life in Azerbaijan, did not bypass the gender aspect. In all subsequent periods of the medieval era, the role of women in public and in everyday life was determined by the Islamic Sharia law. In addition, local national traditions also had their own special influence on the status of women. **Purpose of the Research.** The status of women in medieval societies exhibited both universal patterns and distinct regional variations shaped by religious beliefs and local customs. These historical influences have created enduring cultural models of womanhood that continue to resonate in contemporary societies. In Azerbaijan, the notion of an “ideal Azerbaijani woman” remains a powerful social construct, reflecting centuries of interplay between local traditions and Islamic values. This research examines how the intersection of pre-Islamic Azerbaijani customs and Islamic practices has shaped gender roles and expectations in Azerbaijan, with particular attention to the persistence of these historical influences in modern conceptualizations of feminine identity. By analyzing this cultural synthesis, the study aims at understanding how traditional and religious elements have contributed to current perspectives on gender in Azerbaijani society. **Research Methodology.** Aiming to study the impact of Islam and dogmas of this religion on the gender issue in the case of Azerbaijan, this article sets the objectives of research both in historical and cultural anthropological perspectives. In this regard, the research benefits from using methods of these fields, alongside Islamic Studies and Gender Studies. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, in this respect the study primarily relies on the comprehensive analysis of the studies by historians, philosophers, and

theologians of the medieval period. Moreover, it considers wide-ranging studies from the contemporary period. **Scientific Novelty.** The role and status of women in Islam have been widely studied from historical and modern perspectives in the case of Middle Eastern countries. This paper is the first attempt to scrutinize this issue in the case of Azerbaijan. And being interdisciplinary, it contributes to various fields of study. **Conclusions.** The research findings demonstrate that women's roles in medieval Azerbaijan were multifaceted and nuanced, reflecting a complex interplay of Islamic principles, pre-existing cultural traditions, and contemporary socio-political dynamics. The historical synthesis of these influences created distinct patterns of feminine identity and social participation that continue to resonate in modern Azerbaijani society. This historical model of womanhood, characterized by both constraints and spheres of autonomy, remains influential in shaping current cultural expectations and gender norms in Azerbaijan.

**Key words:** Islam, Women, Gender Issue, Medieval Azerbaijan, Medieval Scholars, Image of Woman.

## ЖІНКИ ТА ІСЛАМ У СЕРЕДНЬОВІЧНОМУ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНІ

**Анотація.** Ісламізація, змінивши всі сфери суспільного життя в Азербайджані, не оминула і гендерний аспект. У всі періоди середньовічної епохи роль жінки в громадському і повсякденному житті визначалася ісламським правом шаріату. Крім того, особливий вплив на становище жінки мали і місцеві національні традиції. **Мета дослідження.** Статус жінки в середньовічному суспільстві демонстрував як універсальні моделі, так і чіткі регіональні відмінності, сформовані релігійними віруваннями та місцевими звичаями. Ці історичні впливи створили стійкі культурні моделі жіночості, які продовжують резонувати в сучасних суспільствах. В Азербайджані поняття “ідеальна азербайджанська жінка” залишається потужним соціальним конструктом, що відображає багатовікову взаємодію між місцевими традиціями й ісламськими цінностями. У пропонованій статті розглядається, як перетин доісламських азербайджанських звичаїв та ісламських практик сформував гендерні ролі й очікування в Азербайджані, зосереджуючи особливу увагу на стійкості цих історичних впливів у сучасних концептуалізаціях жіночої ідентичності. Аналізуючи цей культурний синтез, розвідка має на меті зрозуміти, як традиційні та релігійні елементи вплинули на сучасні погляди на гендер в азербайджанському суспільстві. **Методологія дослідження.** З метою вивчення впливу ісламу та догматів цієї релігії на гендерне питання на прикладі Азербайджану, стаття ставить завдання дослідження як в історичній, так і в культурно-антропологічній перспективах. У зв'язку з цим дослідження виграє з використанням методів цих галузей, поряд з ісламознавством та гендерними студіями. Bazуючись на міждисциплінарному підході, автори передусім посилаються на комплексний аналіз праць істориків, філософів і теологів середньовіччя. Крім того, враховують широкий спектр досліджень сучасного періоду. **Наукова новизна.** Роль і статус жінки в ісламі широко досліджувалися в історичній перспективі та сучасності у випадку країн Близького Сходу. Ця стаття є першою спробою детально розглянути це питання щодо Азербайджану. І будучи міждисциплінарним, він сприяє різноманітним галузям дослідження. **Висновки.** Результати дослідження демонструють, що ролі жінок у середньовічному Азербайджані були багатограними та різноманітними, відображаючи складну взаємодію ісламських принципів, культурних традицій, що існували раніше, і сучасної соціально-політичної динаміки. Історичний синтез цих впливів створив чіткі моделі жіночої ідентичності та соціальної участі, які продовжують резонувати в сучасному азербайджанському суспільстві. Ця історична модель жіночості, яка характеризується як обмеженнями, так і сферами автономії, і сьогодні впливає на формування сучасних культурних очікувань і гендерних норм в Азербайджані.

**Ключові слова:** іслам, жінки, гендерне питання, середньовічний Азербайджан, середньовічні вчені, образ жінки.

**Problem Statement.** The status of women in the medieval period, particularly in the context of Islam, had a complex character within society, shaped by cultural, religious, and

socio-political factors of the time. The medieval Islamic period in Azerbaijan, generally spanning from the 7th century to the 15th century, witnessed the rise of Muslim governance and cultural influences, significantly impacting on the roles and representation of women in public life. Many aspects of the issue, from marriage and managing household to cultural contributions, have been widely studied in the context of the Middle East. However, the local context, traditions, customs and other cultural factors, had its own influence on the roles that women played in the political and cultural life of medieval society. This local context mixed with the Islamic concept of public life has its particularities in the case of Azerbaijan, which included territories of northern Iran and Eastern Caucasus. The scrutiny on the medieval textual sources reveals a more intricate picture of medieval Azerbaijan. Being interdisciplinary in nature, this research seeks to shed light on the issue through interaction of such fields as History and Gender Studies.

**The purpose of this article** consists in the understanding how the integration of Islamic principles with local customs, pre-Islamic traditions, and socio-political structures shaped the lived experiences of women, and to what extent interpretations of Islamic texts and teachings impacted women's public positions. Moreover, it attempts to clarify in what scale the medieval Muslim thinkers, whose works contain more conservative than progressive thoughts regarding marriage, inheritance, and women's participation in public life, had an effect on the society in the Azerbaijani context.

**Review of Recent Research and Publications.** Research on women in Islam is a vast and complex field, marked by both significant progress and ongoing debates. The topic has garnered increasing attention in recent decades, leading to a rich body of scholarly work. One of the key debates and challenges around the gender issue in Islam arose after the publication of Edward Said's "Orientalism" (Said, E., 2003), first published in 1978. Building on E. Said's a new vision of the East, critics contend that much of the research on Muslim women is influenced by Western perspectives and stereotypes, leading to a distorted view of Islamic teachings and women's experiences. Under the light of E. Said's new philosophical approach, some positive thoughts were observed in the literature. The idea is put forward that after the emergence of Islam, Arabian society needed the contribution of women in social and economic life, thus, it allowed them corresponding visibility and social power (Wiebke, 2006, p. 6). Leila Ahmed in "Women and Gender in Islam", first published in 1992, claims that the widespread oppressive practices faced by women in the Middle East result from the dominance of patriarchal interpretations of the Quran (1992).

Nikki R. Keddie in her study analyses of views regarding women Middle East in the early Islamic period, assessments of the role of the Turks and Mongols, analyses of Ottoman court records (Keddie, 2007). Although the region of our study was not included, the work is important for the study of the problem as a whole. The gender aspect in connection with national identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan was studied by N. Tohidi, but in her study the issue in a historical and religious context is not considered (Tohidi, 2021). The issue of Islam in a gender context was partially addressed in the study by Nikoloz Aleksidze (Aleksidze, 2024). Kristin Collins-Breyfogle's research deserves special mention (Collins-Breyfogle, 2011). Although her study dates back to the 19th century, the Tsarist colonial period, it contains a great deal of material on Caucasian Muslim women. As local customary nearly was preserved in whole from the medieval times, these findings have a great importance to our research.

The place and role of women in Islam have been widely studied in contemporary Turkish historiography (Aydin, Akif, 2001, 86–94; Duran, Hamiye, 2018, pp. 411–431). However, the

Azerbaijani context is often overlooked in these studies. Regarding the study of the women's issue in Azerbaijan itself, it should be noted that the “Encyclopedia of Women of Azerbaijan” and many studies dedicated to women who achieved great success in science, art, and public life of the country in different periods of history have been published (Azərbaycan Qadın Ensiklopediyası, 2002). Among them, Naila Velikhanli devoted an article to the role of women in the political life of the country during the Atabeks (Eldenizids) period (Vəlixanlı, N., 2022, pp. 31–41). However, the status of Muslim women in medieval Azerbaijan remains significantly understudied. Therefore, this study is aimed at supplementing research on this issue based on original medieval textual sources in Arabic and Persian.

### **Results of the Research.**

***Main Muslim Sources on Gender: the Quran and Early Islamic Texts.*** Seeking to illuminate interactions between gender, religion, and culture in a pivotal historical period, it is important to consider some Quranic and prophetic Interpretations on gender. This approach requires focusing on examining the primary Islamic texts to understand the original status and rights of women in Islam, as often these texts have been interpreted to justify discriminatory practices. To determine the status of women in society based on the Quran, four key issues need to be considered: gender equality/inequality, age of marriage that defines basis for child marriage problem, veiling, which is actually an issue of body control by men, and women's participation in public life. The Quran's verse in the surah “an-Nisa” states: “Men are in charge of women, because Allah has given one more than the other.” (The Quran, 4:34).

On the one hand, this verse calls on men to protect women, since they are created stronger, but on the other hand, it directly indicates the superiority of men over women. However, there is one nuance that needs to be paid attention to. When the verse states the superiority of some over others, it does not mean only women. According to the grammar rules of the Arabic language, the word “over others” is in the masculine gender, not feminine. In other words, the verse does not assert inequality between the sexes, but between people. Even though, in this context, the verse emphasizes the gender issue, and based on this, we must agree that the Quran indicates the superiority of men over women and calls women to obedience. However, the same surah's other verse proclaims equality between men and women: “And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while a believer – those will enter Paradise.” (The Quran, 4:124). The gender equality is also indicated in the surah “al-Imran” that male or female will be rewarded equally by their deeds and both are equal in reward (The Quran, 3:195). This suggests that stating about the superiority of one person over another (The Quran, 4:34), the Quran means physical and mental abilities, and of course, we can add class status in society, but not gender.

According to Muslim custom, the age of marriage for girls is 9 years old, based on the Hadiths. The most authoritative muhaddith, collector and compiler of hadith, is considered to be Imam Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (810 – 870), who lived much later than the founder of Islam. Despite the controversy surrounding the age of the Prophet Muhammad's wife Aisha at the time of marriage, this issue is voiced differently in the Quran. The Quran's verse in the surah “an-Naba” mention “full-bosomed maidens of equal age”. (The Quran, 78:33). First of all, we see that a man and a woman must be of the same age in marriage, as indicated in the verse “equal age” or more less the same age. And “full-bosomed maiden” can be at least 15-year old girl.

Another Muslim custom is the requirement for women to be veiled. The Quran requires the women believers to guard their private parts and not to display their adornment [body parts],

except that which appears there and **to draw their veils over their chests** and not to display their adornment [body parts] (The Quran, 24:31). There is no direct reference to head covering in the Quran, but this verse shows that women of the Arabian Peninsula wore head coverings without religious requirements and because of this, veil mentioned in the verse. Most likely, due to natural conditions under the scorching sun, both men and women had to wear a special headdress. As it is known, still in the Arab tradition there is a special headdress for men.

It must be agreed with Leila Ahmed's point of view that the Quran has been interpreted from the position of patriarchal views and this has established gender relations for centuries in Muslim societies, including Azerbaijan. However the primary Muslim texts are interpreted, they support severe punishment for both sexes for adultery, as stated in Surah An-Nur "a hundred lashes" (The Quran, 2:12). In addition, Sharia law allows polygamy. All these moments create a realistic picture of medieval Muslim society.

The participation of women in the public life of the community is recorded in early Islamic sources. Early Islamic textual sources such as the Hadith and the works of Muslim scholars mention women names among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (As'hab). Indirectly, this can be considered as recognition of women's participation in public life. In other words, if according to the community rules, women must be invisible in public, then glorifying women who supported the prophet and actively participated in strengthening Islamic society, makes no sense. One of the remarkable Islamic sources that glorify women companions of Muhammad is Ibn Al-Athir's "Usd al-ghabah fi marifat al-Sahabah", written around 1200. This work gives hagiographical description of women's participation in the struggle for establishment and expansion of Islam (Ibn Al-Athir, 2013).

The position of women in medieval Azerbaijan reflects a complex interplay between Islamic religious texts, which generally emphasize female modesty and adherence to religious norms, and pre-Islamic Turkic cultural traditions. This represents a significant shift from the customs of pre-Islamic Turkic societies, where women often held different social roles. The 12th-century poet Nizami Ganjavi provides valuable insights into this contrast through his work 'Iskandarnamah.' Having been married to a Kipchak woman, Ganjavi had firsthand knowledge of Kipchak customs and depicts their women as maintaining significant personal freedoms, including the practice of going unveiled and enjoying considerable social autonomy (Nizami, 2004, p. 314).

***Interactions between Gender, Religion, and Culture in Azerbaijan in the Historical Perspective.*** Pre-Islamic Azerbaijan had a mosaic ethnic and religious composition. On the eve of the Arab conquest, Eastern Caucasus was home to various religious beliefs. In Shirvan, in the regions closer to the Caspian Sea, Zoroastrianism was presented as a religion of tangible number of population, which was implanted by the Sassanids and strengthened by their settlers. To the north and west, in Aran and Shaki, Christianity had a strong position and dominated. Judaism was most likely represented by the Jewish communities of the Caucasus. To this picture we must add the existence of various forms of idolatry beliefs throughout the Eastern Caucasus. As for Iranian Azerbaijan, where Zoroastrianism dominated, it should be noted that there was such a center of Zoroastrianism as Adurgushnasp. All these religious practices played a decisive role in shaping the image of women, creating cultural norms often dictated women's behavior and limited their choices, particularly regarding marriage and family life. Upon arrival of Islam in Azerbaijan the religious landscape gradually began to change in favor of a new religion, but local customs persisted and were mixed with Islamic tradition. By the way patriarchal gender roles in household were defined long before the

monotheistic religions, and in some rates still preserved. It should be noted that the vestiges of pre-Islamic beliefs influenced Islam in Azerbaijan, creating vernacular religion. (Aliyeva, 2013, p. 145). In its turn, this interaction of local tradition and Islam established a strong gender aspiration, which still more or less preserved.

The Oghuz epic “Kitabi Dede Korkut” provides valuable insights into the status of women in early Turkic Muslim society. The epic depicts women maintaining significant personal freedoms even after the adoption of Islam. Female characters in the narrative ride horses alongside men, participate in competitions, and move about freely without face coverings. These portrayals suggest that the initial spread of Islam among the Oghuz Turks did not immediately alter their traditional customs regarding women's roles and freedoms. The epic's representation of women engaging in activities typically associated with male domains indicates that gender relations among the medieval Oghuz were more fluid than in many other contemporary Muslim societies (Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud, 2004).

We do not have the opportunity to study gender issues in medieval Caucasian and Azerbaijani Muslim societies using direct sources. However, the patriarchal relations within the society were preserved as they in medieval times even after the Tsarist Russia invasion of the Caucasus in the 19th century. Thus, the Russian accounts give an authentic picture of the time. Kristin Collins-Breyfogle, using the reports from Russian archives, analyzed the gender issue in the Caucasus (Collins-Breyfogle, 2011). These research results provide us with the valuable insights.

According to K. Collins-Breyfogle's research, some Caucasian communities marriage age was as young as ten or twelve, and others as late as seventeen (Collins-Breyfogle, 2011, p. 33). In these circumstances, there was no chance for girls to get an education, as before they had even reached adolescence, the girls were married off. Moreover, it can be assumed that polygamy gave rise to child marriages among the girls.

In addition to the marriage of underage girls, which can be linked to the misinterpretation of the Quranic text, there was also a local custom of bride kidnapping. While local customs might tolerate or even endorse bride kidnapping, there is no justification of this practice in the Quran. In 1851 in Lahich a father complained to the Tsarist authorities about his abducted daughter, Tul'Sabi, “a girl of no more than fourteen years old”. Her assailants, as father claimed, abducted, “injured and ruined” her (Collins-Breyfogle, 2011, p. 106). He demanded the abductor to be punished under the law. As we see, over the centuries, as political power dynamics shifted, the practice of bride abduction fluctuated in societal acceptance.

Other problem, honour killing practice is not justified by the Quranic text, as well. Honour killing, which are acts of violence, committed by family members usually against women who are accepted to have brought dishonour to the family, have complex historical and cultural roots, deriving from local customary. It was observed in the context of the medieval Caucasus, and persisted even during the modern period. When Khan Muhammad Kurban ogly caught his daughter and her groom in a sexual bond before their marriage, he stabbed both of them and his daughter later died (Collins-Breyfogle, 2011, p. 31). This happened because the girl's father considered their intimacy before marriage to be dishonorable to the family. Patriarchal societies often operated under strict patriarchal systems, where male family members held authority and power over female relatives. Women's behaviour was heavily scrutinized, and any perceived deviation from social norms could be seen as a threat to family honour. Local customs and unwritten laws often dictated the responses to perceived dishonour. In some cases, killing a family member who had violated societal norms was seen as a way to

restore honour. This picture took place in medieval Azerbaijan. However even in the modern period and even after the harsh Soviet policy of emancipation, in the crime chronicle of the Azerbaijan Republic one can come across news about honour killing.

As for veiling of the medieval Muslim women and their dresses, we can find female depictions in the manuscripts of the time, despite the fact that Islam prohibits human depiction. In these miniatures women, of course in headdresses, however their faces, hands and near part of legs clearly seen (Savory, 1980, p. 132). In the medieval miniatures there is no image of fully covered, only eyes seen female illustrations. European travellers also depicted Muslim women in their works, where we see noble or palace women with slightly covered head (Savory, 1980, p. 181). Olearius devotes an entire chapter to the clothing of the Safavid era nobles, including women (Brancaforte, 2003, p. 135). In the illustration he depicted a noble woman with an open face, but her head is covered by silk. It makes sense to think that full control of women body and its full covering arose much later, when patriarchal view prevailed over progressive Islamic views.

Concerning women's participation in public life, despite the limitations and restrictions, women were part of palace life and intrigues, simultaneously political activism. The studies show that women played a great role in Sufi orders (De Nicola, 2014, p. 134) in Central Asia, Iran and Anatolia. Ibn al-Athir's "Al-Kamil fit-Tarikh" contains lots of information on women in palace life and their involvement in politics. He also gave insights on public restrictions for women. In accordance to his report, boatmen were prohibited from ferrying men and women together by the order of Abbasid caliph Al-Muqtadi (Ibn al-Athir, 2002, p. 271). On the one hand, this order indicates the deterioration of the position of women in the public sphere, but on the other hand, it shows that in the eleventh century, Muslim women could leave home unaccompanied by a man and even departure somewhere by boat.

***Medieval Thinkers on the Gender Issue and Impact of Their Thoughts on the Azerbaijani Society.*** The gender issue was considered one of the essential issues in the Muslim societies of South Caucasus and Azerbaijan in the medieval period. By that time a number of various intellectuals extensively described the role of both women and men in politics, family and society focusing on gender and family issues.

Abu Ali Hasan ibn Ali Tusi Nizam ul-Mulk, who was the vizier of the Seljuk sultans, Alp Arslan, and Malikshah, discussed the role of women in the public, social, and political life of the time in his "Siyasatnama" (Book of Government). He emphasized the restriction of ability to participate in men's labour and politics and the other rights of women who participated in state affairs and had special armies and substantial influence on their husbands, sons, kings according to Sharia under the reign of Sultan Tughril, so, this resulted discontents in the harems (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, p. 9). During Malikshah's reign and the vezierate of Nizam ul-Mulk, the women of harem were deprived from politics and state affairs according to excuse that Muslim rulers lacked such a custom. However, due to the efforts of these women and Nizam ul-mulk's rivals, in particular, Sultan Malikshah's wife Turkan Khatun's actions, they managed to enthrone of her son Mahmud (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, pp. 12–16). In addition, with the mentioning of her fearless, and strong-willed features, he discussed intelligence and merit of the women in the harem, and touched upon the general characteristics of the women of that period. In another case, evidence comes from Mahmud's dialogue with a woman whose property was stolen during his reign, and her words that demonstrate the courage of women and the fact that a woman's word, her necessary advice, would be heeded (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, p. 62).

In the textual source, Nizam ul-Mulk pointed, wise men always prevented women's command, capriciousness and advice, opportunity to dominate (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, pp. 200–202), keep women away to know about their army, treasury and country. In such a case, they will attract the people to their side, forcing one to turn to politics and another to dethrone, and will liquidate the power of the authority (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, p. 207). Nizam al-Mulk recounts several stories of women involvement in politics and power, and he argues that the collapse of the Sassanid Empire was due to women in the governance system. (Nizam ul-Mulk, 1891, p. 203). Overall, this source describes the strengthening of women's role as an inappropriate manifestation for them, considering the restrictions of women in politics and governance to be correct. And one can imagine how a prominent scientist negatively influenced the position of women in society.

Valuable information about Muslim women and their status in the medieval society are provided in the poetry of Nizami Ganjavi, the poet and intellectual of the twelfth century, whose works had a colossal influence on the formation of Azerbaijani identity and culture. In his first poem included in “Khamasa”, “Makhzan al-Asrar” (Treasure of Secrets) (1174 – 1175), he emphasized the rights of women and their position in society. In one of the stories of this poem, titled “Story of Sultan Sanjar with Elderly women”, Nizami Ganjavi describes courage of the widow who confronted the sultan and asserted her rights. This widow also claimed that the executioner had touched her property, reputation, and the sultan's justice, despite all this, she demanded her rights demonstrated the courage of the women of period, as well as their awareness in their rights (Ganjavi, 2019, p. 126).

One of the essential characters in Nizami Ganjavi's second poem “Khosrov and Shirin” (1180), Mahin Banu is a powerful women that receives tributes from various countries. So, Nizami describes a female authority that is not inferior from male rulers and proves the strength of women (Ganjavi, 2019, p. 90). Nizami demonstrated that women can participate in politics, administration and authority (Ganjavi, 2019, pp. 65–68) in the image of Shirin and her strength, fame, vigilance. According to the poem, Shirin succeeded Mahin Banu and was a protector of justice, supporter for the oppressed, who was able to increase the prosperity of the country, being successful in politics and administration (Ganjavi, 2019, pp. 151–153). Shirin acts as an advisor to her husband Khosrov, emphasizing importance to avoid oppression, to be kind, to support the peasants to protect his reign for a long time (Ganjavi, 2019, pp. 318–320).

Nizami Ganjavi narrated the role of women in society in his “Leyli and Majnun” (1188). Describing Leyli and Majnun getting to know each other at school, he reports that the girls of that time could get an education, and even girls and boys studied together in the same educational institution. Even though this poem represents tragic injustice for both men and women in the society. Majnun's father offered a price for Leyli, claimed everything in the world has its own price (Ganjavi, 2019, p. 61). Despite the fact that this step removes women from being a human and consider them as property, Leyli's father refuse the proposal because of his thoughts about Majnun was madly in love. And he agreed to marry her to Ibn Salam without asking Leyli's opinion (Ganjavi, 2019, pp. 87–89), despite the fact that Islamic rules require woman's consent to marriage. Composing this tragedy of loving young people, Nizami evokes sympathy and understanding from society.

In his last work, “Iskandarnamah” (1203), female characters were featured a special place. In the first part of the poem, “Sharafnama”, Alexander's behaviour towards Rovshana, daughter of Darius, elevating her in the same position as himself and sending her to govern the Rum



(Ganjavi, 2004, pp. 175, 187–190) is evidenced Nizami's utopian desires. In creating the image of the ruler Barda Nushab, again he shows these desires (Ganjavi, 2004, p. 198), demonstrating that a woman can also play a significant role in governance and management that improved with their policy. Nizami didn't support the complete covering of a woman with a niqab (veil), and in his works he depicts women with their face uncovered to a certain extent.

In general, Nizami Ganjavi portrayed women as free-spirited, brave and intelligent, and despite a number of restrictions of the time, he considered that a man should be loyal and prefer monogamy. Moreover, he represented women as rulers, indicating women's participation in politics and public life.

One of the prominent intellectuals of Nizami's time is Mahsati Ganjavi, a poetess of the twelfth century, famous for her quatrains (rubai). She was one of the first female chess players, first female poets in the East, demonstrated that woman's success in these fields. Her excellent comprehension of Arabic and Persian languages, and notion in politics indicated her knowledge and educated women of the time. Amid restrictions of women's role in public life, Mahsati Ganjavi's poetic activity has a particular significance. In Mahsati Ganjavi's works human feelings and emotions are reflected with authenticity and vitality, and the poetess defends human emotions and their spirituality and encouraged them not to hide their feelings, but to express it (Ganjavi, 1985, p. 44).

The politician, philosopher, and historian of the thirteenth century, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, in his work "Akhlagi-Nasiri", written in 1235, provides his vision on both family issues and the role of women in the society. Tusi prefers free women to slaves and described them like kind, more inclined to fight with the enemy and avoid from bad deeds. Tusi claims that a woman is a man's servant and doesn't assert her authority. Moreover, it is necessary to prohibit her rights in politics (Tusi, 1336, p. 189). He expressed not to prevent them from things that increase her compassion, as well as to consult with the woman in household and family matters, to allow her about food and servants managements. Thus, he expressed a significant role of women in the family. One of the most crucial points in "Akhlaqi Nasiri" is that men are advised to marry only one woman, monogamy. Although he firstly, considers the kings as an exception, because they need to have many successors of the dynasty, then this concept is also applicable to rulers (Tusi, 1336, pp. 188–189). Despite permission to marry more than one woman in accordance to the Surah Al-Nisa (verse 3) in the Quran, monogamy is recommended in order to treat fairly. According to "Akhlaqi Nasiri", a man has to conceal something as a secret: the first of them is a man's feelings about love (Tusi, 1336, p. 189), so the woman does not exploit the man's devotion. The second issue is the amount of property that essential purpose of hiding this is to avoid deceptive advice given by a woman who does not understand property matters (Tusi, 1336, p. 189). In the third point, Akhlaqi Nasiri recommends keeping women away from studying and reciting Surah Yusuf (Tusi, 1336, p. 191). Tusi's purpose could be aim to prevent women's feelings for a married man. Tusi advises that if a man wants to get rid of a woman with bad characters, a man should provide her with property in order to avoid vindictive, severe disposition, and if it is not effective, he notes that it is crucial to leave and embark on a distant journey (Tusi, 1336, pp. 193–194). This statement proves that the intellectuals of the medieval period do not support violence against women, they prefer to solve issues with alternative solutions. Thus, in matters of divorce, certain rights were given to women in the thirteenth- fourteenth centuries. Providing education to girls was one of the essential issues of the time. Tusi mentions that girls should be taught housekeeping, dignified and chaste, in addition, they should be taught arts that are

considered appropriate for them. (Tusi, 1336, p. 173) This also indicated that in contrast to his some conservative attitude to women, Tusi considered certain rights for women in some issues, as well as in art and education for them.

According to the works of the medieval intellectuals, we can say that some of them contributed to the society progress in the gender issue, however, other medieval thinkers supported and facilitated women's restrictions and limitation their visibility in the public life.

**Conclusions.** The results of this study lead to the conclusion that some practices in the medieval Azerbaijan, as in the majority of Muslim countries, derived from the essential Islamic concept of family, such as superiority of men over women, polygamy, veiling and the others. However, the Quran emphasizes spiritual and moral equality between men and women, presenting them as complementary partners before Allah. While affirming their fundamental human dignity, the text also establishes social responsibilities when men are prescribed protective and supportive roles towards women, emphasizing mutual respect and care. Regarding the early marriage of girls, it should be noted that the Quran does not explicitly specify a precise age for marriage for girls. However, in accordance to Surah “an-Naba” (78:33), it can be assumed that marriageable age could be around 15 years. Problematically, subsequent Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia Law) relied more on hadiths – texts compiled 150–200 years after the prophet's death – rather than directly on the Quranic text. This historical development facilitated the practice of child marriages, diverging from potential Quranic guidance on age-appropriate marital unions.

Regarding veiling of women, there is no direct requirement for women to cover their heads in the Quran. It instructs women to cover their cleavage with the edges of their scarves. While this is often interpreted as a requirement for women to wear a hijab, it isn't explicitly stated as such in the guidance provided. It is widely known that in Arab tribes women covered their heads during the pre-Islamic period, primarily to protect themselves from the sun. Based on this, we can conclude that the Quran requires women to cover parts of the body that cause sexual attraction, but does not specifically mandate veiling.

Some deeply harmful practices like bride kidnapping, honour killings, and blood revenge – while often misattributed to Islamic teachings – actually stem from deeply entrenched pre-existing cultural and tribal norms that persist in certain Muslim-majority societies. These practices fundamentally contradict Islamic principles of human dignity and justice, representing localized patriarchal traditions rather than religious mandates.

Medieval philosophers and philosophical movements, especially Sufism, as well as famous scholars and poets with their worldview and outlook on life had a colossal influence on public consciousness, including family and gender roles, both positively and negatively.

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