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# HEYDAR ALIYEV AND THE RENAISSANCE OF AZERBAIJANI LITERATURE

**Abstract:** This article examines the significant role of Heydar Aliyev in the development of Azerbaijani literature and folklore from a scientific and theoretical perspective. The study particularly highlights the importance of cultural policies implemented during the 1970s–1980s in preserving national and moral values, systematizing the collection and publication of folklore, and promoting the development of ashug art. The article comprehensively discusses the measures, decrees, and state initiatives carried out both during the Soviet period and the years of independence, emphasizing state support for literature and folklore. As a result, it concludes that the policies implemented by Heydar Aliyev made a substantial contribution to the renaissance of Azerbaijani literature, the strengthening of national identity, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijani literature, folklore, national and moral values, ashug art, ideology of Azerbaijanism, cultural policy, literary environment, national identity, renaissance

## Introduction

Azerbaijani literature and folklore are among the principal domains that reflect the national identity, historical memory, and spiritual values of the people. The preservation and development of these fields have been closely linked to state policy. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the purposeful measures implemented under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev have enabled Azerbaijani literature and folklore to enter a new stage of development.

Beginning from the 1970s, policies aimed at strengthening national spirit, fostering patriotism, and promoting the ideology of Azerbaijanism led to significant transformations in the literary and cultural environment. During this period, the collection, publication, and promotion of folklore materials expanded considerably, and favorable conditions were created for the development of ashug art.

At the same time, during the years of independence, the continuation of these policies ensured that literature and folklore remained under state patronage, leading to the implementation of new publications, scholarly research, and cultural projects. In this regard, the cultural and literary policy of Heydar Aliyev can be regarded as a crucial stage in the renaissance of Azerbaijani literature.

The speeches and reports delivered by the prominent statesman Heydar Aliyev at the 10th Congress of Writers, the 3rd Congress of Turkic World Writers, and various anniversary events were regarded as a means of serving the people as part of literary education and contributed significantly to the flourishing of Azerbaijani literature. At the same time, in the 1990s, a new idea emerged suggesting that works written during the Soviet period were insufficient for literature. This view was associated with the artificial elevation of certain individuals into positive literary heroes as prototypes, exaggerating them into historical figures. It was argued that,

in this period, the mistakes of the communist ideology were being repeated in different forms within literature.

Heydar Aliyev firmly rejected such approaches, advising writers to evaluate personalities without separating them from their time, historical context, and environment, and to portray them as they truly were. Despite the difficulties faced in developing the newly established state, he paid great attention to the organization of jubilees for prominent figures of culture, literature, and art, thereby supporting the development of Azerbaijani literature and culture in all spheres. His policy, which included a strong commitment to folklore and national-spiritual values, deserves particular recognition. Both during the Soviet and independence periods, his attention to folklore resulted in numerous resolutions and decrees issued by the state authorities. Between 1969 and 1973 alone, 15 decrees were signed to preserve cultural heritage. This tradition was continued by the decree of August 4, 2003, on the implementation of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the Legal Protection of Azerbaijani Folklore Samples."

The strengthening of national spirit, patriotism, and the ideology of Azerbaijanism, fostered by Heydar Aliyev's far-sighted policies in the 1970s, led to significant developments in the field of folklore. He mobilized the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and the broader public toward strategic national goals and prepared them for the struggle for independence. In his report at the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan on March 20, 1970, he stated: "Sometimes, workers in the press, radio, and television fail to adequately cover important issues related to the spiritual life of the people." Such statements contributed to the emergence of programs and articles devoted to national-spiritual values in the literary environment of that time.

As a result of his support for folklore, numerous materials related to folk creativity were published in newspapers such as "Ədəbiyyat və incəsənət" and "Azərbaycan gəncləri," as well as in journals like "Qobustan," "Ulduz," and "Azərbaycan." Television programs such as "Ozan" and "Bulaq" played a crucial role in popularizing folklore and attracting public interest. In the 1970s and 1980s, the expansion of folklore publications, the convening of the Congress of Ashugs in 1984 after a 20-year hiatus, and the organization of folklore festivals serve as clear examples of this progress. Events such as the establishment of the "Ashiq Pari" assembly, the "Kharibulbul" music festival, and the series of events titled "Return to Koroghlu" were among the major cultural initiatives of that period.

In 1981, by the decision of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, a special action plan was developed to organize folklore studies at a higher level. These initiatives increased public interest in folklore and ensured the systematic study and publication of the artistic heritage of folk masters. Heydar Aliyev also initiated the celebration of jubilees of prominent ashugs, including the 150th anniversary of Ashug Alasgar (1972) and the 180th anniversary of Ashug Ali (1981). Additionally, institutions such as the "Saz School" in Aghstafa (1980) and the "Ozan-Ashug Museum" in Tovuz were established to preserve and promote national cultural values. Various folklore festivals, including "Qurbani Saz Festival," "Bayati Festival," and "Epic Nights," were also organized.

Many ashugs and cultural figures were awarded honorary titles such as "Honored Art Worker" and "Honored Cultural Worker of Azerbaijan," which further stimulated interest in folklore. By supporting the study of Azerbaijani folklore, the development of ashug art, and the promotion of national traditions, Heydar Aliyev laid the foundation for the spiritual and cultural development of future independence.

Following the restoration of independence in the 1990s, the return of Heydar Aliyev to power ensured renewed state support for this field. Folklore groups were restored, and significant

publications such as the Azerbaijani Folklore Corpus, Atlas, and multi-volume anthologies were produced. The jubilees of the "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud" epic and Ashug Alasgar were organized at the state level under his direct supervision. The decree of July 5, 2003, on celebrating the 110th anniversary of Ashug Shamkir and the establishment of the Institute of Folklore further demonstrate his commitment to folklore development.

Not only folklore but all branches of literature received attention under his leadership. During his presidency, Heydar Aliyev regularly met with contemporary writers, awarded them state honors, and highly evaluated their contributions to the literary-historical process during jubilee events. This policy increased public interest in literature and significantly contributed to its development. As a result, numerous artists were awarded honorary titles such as "People's Poet," "People's Writer," and "Honored Art Worker."

In 2002, he granted presidential scholarships to 150 individuals who had contributed to science, culture, art, and education. Among the most notable decisions was awarding the "Istiglal" Order to prominent literary figures such as Mammad Araz, Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh, and Khalil Rza Uluturk. Furthermore, in 1996, the Fuzuli International Prize was established to stimulate literary development, and in 1997, a decree was issued to increase state support for Azerbaijani writers. Journals such as "Azerbaijan," "Qobustan," "Ulduz," and "Literaturny Azerbaijan," as well as the newspaper "Ədəbiyyat," began to be published at the state's expense.

On August 6, 1998, Heydar Aliyev signed a decree "On additional measures to ensure freedom of speech, thought, and information in the Republic of Azerbaijan," which effectively abolished censorship. His policy of caring for folklore and national-spiritual values remains one of the most commendable aspects of his legacy. Both during the Soviet and independence periods, his attention to folklore resulted in numerous state decisions and decrees. The signing of 15 decrees between 1969 and 1973 to protect cultural heritage and the 2003 decree on the legal protection of Azerbaijani folklore once again confirm the continuity of this policy.

The far-sighted and wise policies pursued by Heydar Aliyev in the 1970s, aimed at strengthening national spirit, patriotism, and the ideology of Azerbaijanism, led to significant transformations in the field of folklore studies. He mobilized the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, as well as the broader population, toward long-term strategic goals and prepared them for the struggle for independence. In his report delivered at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan on March 20, 1970, he stated: "...Sometimes, workers in the press, radio, and television fail to adequately cover important issues related to the spiritual life of the people" [1]. Such statements, emphasizing national and moral values, contributed to the emergence of numerous programs and articles within the literary environment of that period.

At the same time, the substantial support provided by Heydar Aliyev to folklore ensured the publication of extensive materials on folk creativity in newspapers such as "Ədəbiyyat və incəsənət" and "Azərbaycan gəncləri," as well as in journals including "Qobustan," "Ulduz," and "Azərbaycan." Television programs such as "Ozan" and "Bulaq" attracted considerable audience interest and played a crucial role in the development and popularization of folklore. The rapid expansion of folklore publications in the 1970s and 1980s, the convening of the Congress of Ashugs in 1984 after a twenty-year hiatus, and the organization of folklore festivals are clear indicators of this progress.

Furthermore, the establishment of the "Ashiq Pari" assembly, the organization of the "Kharibulbul" music festival, and the implementation of the series of ashug events titled "Return to Koroghlu" were among the key development programs of the time. In 1981, by the decision of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, a comprehensive action plan was

developed to organize folklore activities in accordance with advanced scholarly requirements, which became one of the principal directions in the development of Azerbaijani folklore. These initiatives significantly increased public interest in folklore. Among them were the decrees signed by the national leader concerning the comprehensive study of folk artists' творчество (creative heritage) and the collection and publication of their works.

Heydar Aliyev also directly initiated the celebration of jubilees of prominent masters of ashug art, including the 150th anniversary of Ashug Alasgar (1972) and the 180th anniversary of Ashug Ali (1981). In addition, in order to strengthen interest in folklore and to preserve and promote national spiritual values, the "Saz School" was established in Aghstafa in 1980, and the "Ozan-Ashug Museum" named after Ashug Huseyn Bozalganli was founded in Tovuz. Numerous folklore festivals—such as the "Qurbani Saz Festival," "Bayati Festival," and "Epic Night"—were also organized.

A number of ashugs and cultural figures—including Ashug Huseyn Javan, Ashug Shamshir Gocayev, Ashug Shakir Hajiyev, Ashug Alakbar Jafarov, Ashug Adalat Nasibov, Ashug Panah Panahov, and Ashug Imran Hasanov—were awarded the honorary title of "Honored Art Worker," while figures such as Izzatali Zulfugarov, Alasgar Shakili, and Ali Karimov, and later, during the independence period, Ashug Ahliman and Ashug Adalat Dalidagli, were granted the title of "Honored Cultural Worker of Azerbaijan." These recognitions further stimulated public interest in folklore.

By leading comprehensive initiatives aimed at the in-depth study of Azerbaijani folklore, the development of ashug art, and the promotion of national traditions during the Soviet period, Heydar Aliyev laid the groundwork for the national-spiritual development of future independence. Following the restoration of independence in the 1990s, his return to power ensured that this sphere once again came under state patronage, leading to the revival of folklore collectives.

As a result of his policies, major scholarly works such as the Azerbaijani Folklore Corpus, the Folklore Atlas, and multi-volume folklore anthologies were published. The jubilees of the "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud" epic and Ashug Alasgar were organized at the state level under direct presidential supervision. Moreover, the decree of July 5, 2003, on celebrating the 110th anniversary of Ashug Shamkir and the establishment of the Institute of Folklore stand as clear evidence of Heydar Aliyev's enduring care for and commitment to the development of Azerbaijani folklore.

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