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# ՎԱՐԴԶԻ



ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ՃԱՐՏԱՐԱԴԵՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՂ ԳԻՄՆԱԴՐԱՄ  
RESEARCH ON ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE

## VARDZK

N 8

2013





Sargis Israelian  
**PAGES FROM MY DIARY**



p. 1

Armen Ter-Stepanian  
**LAPIDARY INSCRIPTIONS IN MANUSCRIPTS  
 KEPT IN MESROP MASHTOTS RESEARCH  
 INSTITUTE OF YEREVAN**

Յամի եղծնարիւրերորդի քառամներ  
 որդի ուծերորդի թուաբերութեան յայտոց՝  
 աարտեցար յեկեղծութիւն երջանիկ նաշա  
 տակին յովհայ յայ լայն յայ ժամանակ և  
 տեղի զանազան գրչաւք ի գաւառիս կիկի  
 կեցոց հորդ յանատիկ դռնակս բարձր կո  
 ճեցեալ ի դատնագոյն ժամանակի յորում  
 յոյժ զգոյմք յանարիւնաց յըջագտեք  
 ի սմանեզ նրախտատրսն զըջխատեալսի  
 սմա յիշեցորի տրևորութիւն յիշխբարիսարչ  
 սեղոյն յատեանն:

p. 14

Samvel Karapetian  
**REVIEW & CRITICISM**



p. 56



**N 8 2013**

**ԳԼԽԱՎՈՐ ԽՄԲԱԳԻՐ  
 ՍԱՄՎԵԼ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ**  
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**SAMVEL KARAPETIAN**

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 ԷՄՄԱ ԱՐԱՅԱՍՅԱՆ**  
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 ՈՒՍՈՒՆԱՄՍԻՐՈՂ ՀԻՄՆԱԴՐԱՄ**  
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## PAGES FROM MY DIARY

by Sargis Israelian

See the beginning in: *Vardzk*, no. 6 (April-June 2012)

### In Tiflis

It was the last year of our work in Nizh. I continued working and receiving treatment in Tiflis. After the school year was over, Maro set out to come to me with our children. The distance from Nizh to the railway station of Lyak being 46 versts, they were obliged to cross several rivers the largest of which was the Tyurgan. It was the end of spring and the rivers had grown abundant, having overflowed their banks after the melting of snow in the mountains. Under these conditions, a young woman attempted to cross the Tyurgan by carriage together with two little children. Suddenly the coach turned sideways in the middle of the river and my son Rafik fell into the water. Can you imagine Maro's state? She did not know whether to save the child in her arms or rush to rescue the one already drowning. Hearing her cries and weeping, some peasants working in a nearby rice field hurried to her and saved Rafik.

After Maro had reached Tiflis together with our children, we had to rent a flat and take up living in that city. What was I to do? My salary was too insufficient for me to earn our living. The school year began only in three months and it remained obscure what we were to do afterwards. We abandoned the thoughts of going to a summer house and decided to stay in Tiflis. We had to find a new source of income and we *did* find it: private lessons. Maro now had four pupils whom she trained for entering a gymnasium. Under the tsarist authorities, apart from having good command of Russian, applicants for the first preparatory department were also to know writing, reading and the four elementary operations of arithmetic up to 100.

My Rafik's school became a true problem to me. In Nizh he was already 6 or 7. We lived right in the school house and he was always in the classrooms together with his mother although he would not stay long in the same room. If he was late for classes because of games, he would approach the classroom doors and listen to the lessons secretly. As soon as he heard his mother's voice in any room, he would enter there with full confidence and sit down on the first desk. The children learnt poems and sang songs, but Rafik did not learn any Russian or Armenian poem during those four to five years; nor did he learn any songs, and that was a

true tragedy to me. What was I to do if he turned out totally stupid?

"Our son's going to be a second Artashes Gharibjanian, dear Maro. What're we to do?"

"But why are you so desperate?" My Maro, who was always so full of hope and optimistic about life, my unsurpassed Maro, said. "He's still a child. He'll show his cleverness. You'll see what a brilliant boy he'll become. Everybody's going to admire him."

Thus, Maro kept giving me hope and even reproaching me, but Artashes Gharibjanian's image still haunted me day and night.

On 25 August all the four pupils of Maro were admitted to the Third Male Gymnasium of Tiflis.

"You can congratulate us, dear Sergo, Rafik's entered the gymnasium," Maro said.

"You don't say so! I don't believe it!"

"I'm very serious, dear Sergo. Rafik's already a gymnasium student."

"I don't believe it! How did he manage that?"

And Maro told me the following: "Well, when I had lessons with my pupils, Rafik was always present there. At first I paid no attention to him as he was hardly 7, but he kept attending all the lessons and even often corrected the pupils' mistakes. I gradually started involving him in our lessons. He had good command of both Russian and arithmetic. Can you imagine he did better in the exams than the other pupils?"

I was very happy. So Maro had truly told me the truth.

Rafik did not study long at the Russian gymnasium. In the days of the February Revolution of 1917, the Third Male Gymnasium of Tiflis was nationalised and became an Armenian one as 90 percent of its pupils were Armenians. Rafik did well at the Armenian school and in a couple of years' time, he already wrote poems. His teacher of the Armenian language was poet Vahan Mirakian, the author of an Armenian-language book entitled *The Hunting of Lalvar* («Լալվարի որսը»). Whenever he entered the teachers' room with a smile, holding some paper, his colleagues would immediately ask, "Well, Rafik has again written a poem, has he not?" And Vahan Mirakian would read my son's poem for them.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> One of Rafik's poems was devoted to bats:

Յերեկն եկավ,  
Ու ալսպես էր նա անուն,

It was a great pleasure to read or listen to Rafik's poems, but unfortunately, none of them is preserved now.

Vahan Mirakian cherished great hopes connected with Rafik, but in vain, as he became an architect. Probably, I have had my own share of "guilt" in his choice of profession. After secondary school, he decided to continue his education at the Arts Academy of Tiflis. After a year, that establishment sent some of its students, including Rafik, to Leningrad on an excursion. Seeing the works of the students of Leningrad's Institute of Architecture, he decided to study there and telegraphed me with a request to send his documents that were in the Arts Academy to Leningrad. I immediately did so and this proved a milestone in his professional career.

But prior to all this, Rafik continued making Vahan Mirakian happy with his poems at the nationalised gymnasium now called school no. 72.

The Armenian intellectuals of Tiflis were going to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Atabek Khenkoyan's literary activity. Vahan Mirakian submitted one of Rafik's poems, dedicated to this poet, to the jubilee committee and they decided to open the literary part of the festive event with it; moreover, the author himself was to recite it. Maro's happiness was beyond description. She sewed new clothes for Rafik specially for that day and we took him to Stepan Lisitsian.

We were in the hall. The artistic part of the ceremony was about to begin. S. Lisitsian asked us with gestures where Rafik was. We answered that he was on the stage. However, he could not be found anywhere. We were worried. Maro was about to burst into tears. Rafik was neither on the stage nor with us. Where could he be? To tell the truth, I myself was very troubled but I checked my annoyance for Maro not to guess anything.

The artistic part of the ceremony began. We had not found Rafik yet. Can you just imagine our situation? While backstage, S. Lisitsian suddenly saw Rafik (I do not know why he had gone there, whether to look for my son or for some other purpose).

"Where've you been, fellow? We've been looking for you everywhere! Come on! Come on!"

Rafik came onto the stage. He could hardly be seen, blushed and ready to burst into weeping every minute.

He began reciting the poem fluently, with articulate enunciation: "Here is grandpa Khenko with a large sack of fables on his back..."<sup>23</sup>

Rafik finished reciting the poem and the audience started applauding. The child was in perplexity and did not know what to do. To his luck, Atabek hugged,

kissed and thanked him. I took him to Maro and he threw himself into her lap.

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1917. The February bourgeois-democratic revolution. Endless mass rallies. Thousands of different organisations and unions were all of a sudden established.

Early in May, an Armenian teachers' conference was held in Tiflis with more than a hundred teachers participating in it together with such eminent pedagogues as Isahak Harutiunian, Stepan Lisitsian, Hovhannes Ter-Mirakian, Aramayis Yerznkian, Sargis Khanoyan, Sargis Abovian, Sirakan Tigranian, Tigran Musheghian and others. The conference agenda comprised a lot of issues, including:

- 1 the establishment of a teachers' union;
- 2 the exemption of teachers from military service;
- 3 foreign language-speaking schools;
- 4 free obligatory education;
- 5 the nationalisation of schools, etc.

Parallel with participating in this conference, I wrote articles about its participants, agenda and other issues for the *Horizon* paper (the *Surhandak* no longer existed at that time): unluckily, I have preserved only one of them (no. 99, 14 May 1917). In those days, conferences were parallelly held in Yerevan, Kars and Alexandropole so that I also wrote about them (S. Khondakian, one of the participants of Tiflis Conference, declared that these meetings were not entitled to adopt decisions on behalf of all Armenian teachers).

Unfortunately, I cannot say anything regarding the sittings of the conference of Tiflis as I have no materials at my disposal, as already stated above. My memory fails me. I can only say that while the Armenian teachers' conference discussed its agenda issues, the Special Transcaucasian Committee, which had taken up the reins of the government of the country, was working out rules for the establishment of administrative bodies there. Groups of 3 to 5 people were formed for the election of such bodies, and Aramayis Yerznkian, one of the members of an ad hoc committee set up for this purpose, advanced my candidacy for the district of Nukhi, as I had worked there for many years.

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Our group of four, consisting of two Armenians and two Azerbaijanies (Mekhak Zargarian, Aliyev, Hajiyev and me) had already arrived in Nukhi by early June. We were to travel through Armenian and Azerbaijani villages to supervise the elections of administrative bodies on the spot. For this purpose, we divided the district into four parts.

The township of Kakh was the last place in the part where I was to work (I was to conduct elections in the villages of Meghabash and Kakhbash). My old friends

Ամբողջ գիշեր խաղ ամսմն ("Midday came and night came and thus he played all night long"). S. Israelian notes that he remembers only the first and last two lines of this poem (translator).

23 The Armenian original reads: «Ահա եկաւ Խնկո պապը, Շալակն ամսմն ամսակնրի մնծ պարկը...».



were very happy to see me and held a special reception to honour me, headed by Manase Muradian, the President of the local Board of Trustees.

Who was elected as a village head? The rich and only the rich. “What are we doing?” I kept thinking. “Well, but what can I do? These are free elections, aren’t they?”

The elections were held in the old, traditional way. We could not have secret voting as 95 percent of the voters were illiterate. I could only use my weapon of a journalist and raised this painful issue in the *Horizon* paper published in Tiflis (see «Հորիզոն» [*Horizon*], nos. 129, 133, 136, 142, 152, 155, 1917). I wrote two articles entitled “In Armenian Villages” and “In Turkish Villages” (present-day Azerbaijanies were formerly called Turks).

The union of the three Transcaucasian republics was not predestined to last long and independent republics were established. The Government of the Republic of Georgia was headed by the Mensheviks’ Party, that of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the Musavatists and the Republic of Armenia by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. These three parties had certain discrepancies, the conflict between the Mensheviks and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation gradually escalating into a war.

The Armenians of Tiflis were in a terrible state although outwardly the public order seemed not to have been disturbed. The nationalisation of schools proceeded rapidly, but the danger of new calamities and persecutions had not passed yet. The Mensheviks succeeded in sowing enmity between the Armenian and Georgian nations who had been living side by side in peace and constant willingness to help each other for centuries. The Armenians were incessantly arrested in Tiflis only because of their national identity. Nobody asked who you were or what your business was. Peaceful civilians were continually sent to Kutayis in endless caravans as “prisoners of war.”<sup>24</sup> This city was in rejoicement. “If our troops have taken so many captives who remains to fight? Probably, our army is already on the approaches to Yerevan and will soon take it.” This is what the people of Kutayis thought.

In contrast to these presumptions, the regular Menshevik army kept fighting Shulaver for days, being unable to break its resistance.

The incarceration of Armenians continued, none of them being safe from finding themselves in prison. Zhordania, the Head of Georgia’s Menshevik Government, sent a document with his signature to Arshak

Zurabian, a public figure, a member of the State Duma and one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party, stating that he was exempt from arrest. Zurabian, however, sent that repulsive document back saying: “I shall be where my nation is.” My readers can hardly imagine the pride and satisfaction with which the Armenians read Arshak Zurabian’s open letter to Zhordania in the press, repeating the same words: “I shall be where my nation is.”

The Armenians of Tiflis had hardly sighed a sigh of relief when the sinister news of the advancing Turks spread everywhere: “The Turks’re coming...!” “The Turks’re coming...!” “The Turks’ve taken Alexandrople...” “The Turks’re in Gharakilisa...” “The Turks’re coming...!”

The Armenians were terrified and panic-stricken... Every Armenian in Tiflis, especially those who could afford to do so, thought of running away. . Everybody ran away however they could. As there were no hopes of return, they sold everything they had... indeed, if we may call it selling, for the price was set not by the seller but by the buyer, depending on the latter’s conscience. Suffice it to say that a piano costing a thousand roubles was sold by no more than 100 roubles. The Armenians of Tiflis, and particularly the rich, were ready to sacrifice everything to escape certain death. While part of those panic-stricken were still in Tiflis, others had already reached the approaches to Vladikavkaz.

It goes without saying that this situation affected the Armenian schools of Tiflis most negatively. Who could think of education and lessons when everybody faced certain death... Like the rest of the people, teachers were emigrating towards the pass of Darial, too...

The news of the victorious end of the battle of Sardarapat spread from mouth to mouth throughout Tiflis. The Turkish army had proved unable to take Yerevan and had been totally crushed in Sardarapat. News of peace treaties came from Sarighamish and Kars. The Armenians took the news of the annexation of Armenian lands with great sorrow and deep pain: the Armenians of Kars could not speak about it without tears. They could not reconcile themselves to that thought, but at the same time, they realised that Kars was sacrificed for the sake of Batum. It became a ransom for Batum. But what could they do?

The Soviet authorities took over the reins of power in Armenia. The Turks retreated, withdrawing their troops from Gharakilisa and Alexandrople. The Armenians who had stayed in Tiflis either because they wished so or had not been able to run away sighed a sigh of relief.

“Thank God we did not flee,” they said.

However, their tranquility did not last long. Tiflis was again in utter tumult and turmoil. The streets teemed with servicemen: the Mensheviks’ Governmen-

<sup>24</sup> For details regarding the concentration camps established by the Menshevik authorities in Kutayisi and Bakuriani for the purpose of exterminating the Armenians, see Чалхушян Г., Красная книга [G. Chalkhushian, Red Book] (Rostov-on-Don, 1921) (note by the editor).

tal cars endlessly rushed here and there. The city was at a fuss day and night. Every day people gathered here and there to exchange news.

“There’re armed Bolsheviks in Ortajala.”

“The 11th Red Army has reached Poyli under Legrand’s and Orjonikidze’s command.”

“The Bolsheviks of Lori have got to Godi.”<sup>25</sup>

“The railway bridge of Soghanlukh has been exploded to hinder the Bolshevik detachments’ entry to Tiflis from Lori.”

“Zhordania has run away to Constantinople via Batum and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is negotiating for the de jure recognition of Georgia. He’s taken the entire gold with him so that the banks’re totally empty.”

“Ramashvili escaped this night, and Chkhenkeli’s fled with Zhordania.”

“Ramashvili ran away together with Tzereteli.”

On 25 March 1921, the Red Army entered Tiflis from the direction of Navtlugh and the Bolsheviks of Lori reached there from the direction of Kojor.

Georgia found itself under the domination of the Soviet powers. Loudspeakers were installed in the streets. All the state establishments were now Soviet bodies. The press started publishing some Soviet papers: the *Karmir Astgh* (*Red Star*) in Armenian (editor: Suren Yerznkian); the *Communist* in Georgian and the *Zarya Vostoka* (*Dawn of the Orient*) in Russian. I started working for the *Karmir Astgh* as a correspondent, my very first material being a humorous piece.<sup>26</sup>

### A Change in My Working Field

Hardly had a month passed after the Soviet takeover of Georgia when I was invited to work in the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment and supervise the work of abolishing illiteracy and semi-literacy amidst the ethnic minorities of the country: the Armenians, Russians and Azerbaijanis. I accepted the offer with great willingness as I could not imagine myself doing some other, more useful work. I can say I was born to work in that sphere: even prior to my activity as a teacher, I was very fond of teaching adults to read and write and did so voluntarily, whereas now I had been entrusted with my favourite occupation by the very state. So I accepted that invitation with great pleasure. However, when I passed on to my duties, I suddenly found out that my activities in the General Municipal Department of Enlightenment of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment were not confined to only spreading literacy among those illiterate and semi-literate. They also included other spheres of the

work of that Department: its library, cabin/reading-hall and literacy-spreading amidst trade unions.

Well, the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy was my profession, but what about the other tasks? Anyway, I decided to get acquainted with that work parallel with my favourite occupation.

Thus, the field of my activities changed: a parish school teacher had now become an employee of the General Municipal Department of Enlightenment. I was infinitely happy about the fact that I had to make illiterate people literate, enabling them to read books and understand other people’s thoughts expressed in written form; in a word, I had to open the “blind eyes” of the illiterate for them to see and perceive the world in a new way. From that day onwards, I forgot about getting tired and taking rest. I kept going from Leninian to the Commissars’ Districts and vice versa. In one place I established a factory school for the illiterate; in another I checked their attendance to the lessons; in a third one I helped the teacher to conduct his work in the right path.

I went to the House of Trade Unions, entered one of them and praised its school or expressed my dissatisfaction with it. I started workshops for the teachers involved in the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy (they were called *servicemen of culture*), encouraged them, pointed to their mistakes and omissions and delivered lectures on pedagogical themes. I was thoroughly absorbed in, and carried away with, this work, having forgotten about my family and children.

The area in which I had harnessed myself to work was like an uncultivated soil which had at last found its tiller. I was very enthusiastic, my enthusiasm and devotion passing to the workers of the departments of people’s education.

Appropriate textbooks and stationery would greatly add to the fruitfulness of this work. *Towards Light*: this was the title of an Armenian textbook prepared by eminent pedagogue Hovhannes Ter-Mirakian. I was given the task of following the process of its publication so that it might be available in due time. It was made up according to an American method which stressed not the teaching of each letter/sound separately but that of the whole word and sentence containing numerous letters and sounds. A textbook made up by this method might perhaps be acceptable for the teaching of English but not Armenian. It could not be acceptable either for adults or children. English is quite a different language in which a word is spelled in a way but pronounced in quite another (thus for instance, ‘fought’ is pronounced as ‘fot’).

It is common knowledge that after reaching maturity, the adult’s psychology becomes confined to the tools and objects surrounding him. Thus, for instance, a tailor pays attention to the clothes of the people around him, the shoemaker to their shoes, etc. I cannot

25 Koda Village in present-day Tetri-Tzegharo District, Georgia (note by the editor).

26 See the humorous work in: *Vardzk*, no. 8 [in Armenian] (Yerevan, 2013).

forget an occurrence. One day I entered a large music shop in Tiflis together with a friend of mine who was a carpenter. It abounded in a wide variety of musical instruments. A small part of it had been partitioned for an office with boards and did not have windows.

“Look here! What ugly and uncouth boards! As if they’ve been hewn with an axe,” my friend the carpenter said and concluded, “Everybody boasts being a master!”

He did not pay any attention to the musical instruments. He was interested only in what he used every day and to what his psychology was confined.

I was going to deal with people of such psychology, trying to abolish their illiteracy. They had to handle a textbook, pens, copy-books, desks and blackboards, all this being new and unfamiliar to them. The first lesson of the aforementioned textbook of American method, entitled *We are Free*, only added to the difficulties facing the workers of culture, including me. How could an illiterate adult write, say, eleven letters at once if he was unable to write even their small particles? The task of the abolition of illiteracy was predestined to suffer failure especially if unskilled teachers were involved in its implementation. That textbook was severely criticized by pedagogue Stepan Lisitsian, but what could we do if there was no other manual at hand? Indeed, on every page the text had some comments clarifying the method and giving some instructions, but could they be of any use to the pioneer, Komsomol, senior pupil or worker of the cultural field who had no idea about that work? For this reason, parallel with fighting illiteracy and semi-literacy, we also paid great attention to the methodological training of teachers.

Apart from workshops and methodological training, held in five districts of Tiflis, we also repeatedly organised lectures on pedagogical and methodological themes throughout the city. We invited prominent pedagogues who delivered lectures in Russian (it was easy to understand for everybody). Among our lecturers was Maria Orakhelashvili, Georgia’s People’s Commissar of Enlightenment who fell victim to the cult of the individual, Georgi Khechapuridze, the head of the General Department of Municipal Enlightenment (now: a true member of Georgia’s Academy of Sciences), etc.

I clearly remember Nestor Tsertsevadze, an old Bolshevik and a retired teacher all in grey hair, with a rich grey beard, making a speech during one of these lectures. He explained the meaning of the word ‘pedagogue,’ urging the workers of culture not to spare efforts to carry out Lenin’s famous commandment: “Learn, learn, learn.” Many of those present in the hall asked me whether he was a former priest or not. Tsertsevadze asked for the floor again and said: “Yes, I am a priest, but not one who preaches the commandments of Jesus. I am struggling for the ideas of Marx and En-

gels, and I am a preacher of their ideology.” The workers of culture present in the hall burst into applause.

I myself often made talks during these meetings. Some of them were devoted to:

- 1 methodological work at schools teaching literacy to adults;
- 2 the role of the mother tongue at adult schools;
- 3 the psychological foundations of the method of literacy teaching;
- 4 written tasks at adult schools, etc.

In order to establish groups of illiterate and semi-literate people, we held meetings, compiled lists and appointed teachers. Once we went to a leather mill (formerly after Adilkhanov) in Ortajala, Tiflis, where 90 percent of the workers were Armenians. By some coincidence, on the day of our visit, the President of the Supreme Council of Georgia, Philip Makharadze, had convened a meeting at the factory. In his speech, he compared illiterate people with the blind and called on everybody to abolish it within a short time. The Armenian workers declared: “We want to abolish our illiteracy but we wish to learn Russian.” It took us great efforts to convince them that they had to learn their mother tongue.

We became witness to a similar occurrence during the opening of the Transcaucasian Communist University, when some people who had come from Armenia expressed a desire to study in its Russian department. Indeed, Alexandre Miasnikian got angry and did not allow them to do so, saying that Russia did not need them: they were to work amidst Armenians in Armenia...

The Armenians are a strange nation ready to renounce everything Armenian at every moment. Take our children’s names which are mostly foreign and alien.

In the years of the Great Patriotic War, night watching was established for all the schools of Tiflis. One day Deputy Minister of Enlightenment David Javakhashvili suggested that we visit schools together and check the night watching. We went to Georgian secondary school no. 18. In the teachers’ room one of the teachers was sitting by the telephone, which meant that everything was all right. The Deputy Minister approached a bookcase behind the glass of which the graduates’ name list hung. He began reading it.

“Comrade Sergo, look here,” he said to me, “all the pupils have historical Georgian names. It is good, is it not?”

“Of course, it is very good.”

But I felt ashamed... because our children had names like John, Juliet, even Kartughar and Klazet...

The Council of Trade Unions as well as their committees comprised numerous Armenian employees with whom I was on close terms.

The Director of the Trade Union of Commerce and State Establishments was Minas Melikian, an old Bolshevik; the head of its Department of Culture was Antonian; the Director of the Trade Union of Food and Taste was Aznavurian, and the head of its Department of Culture Vahagn Meliksetian. The Director of the Trade Union of Chemical Industry was Khoren Avetisian; that of the Trade Union of Textile Industry Levon Babajanian, etc.

The head of the Department of Culture within the Council of Trade Unions was Gevorg Kurulov, who later became Director of the same Council and then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia (he fell victim to the cult of individual). One of the members of this Council was Levon Elbekian.

At that time, trade unions throughout the Soviet Union amounted to 23, 22 of which were in Georgia (except the Trade Union of Paper Industry), most of my work being connected with them.

During the initial period of the Soviet takeover of Georgia, it was very difficult to teach adults to read and write: after his eight-hour work, the worker or employee hurried to do some extra work to earn his daily living as the state salary was not enough to live on. For this reason, a six-hour working day was established for illiterate and semi-literate workers and employees for them to spend the remaining two hours on their lessons. The illiterate, however, tried to find some other source of income instead of attending classes.

### A Trade Union Worker

In 1922 the Cultural Department of the Council of Georgia's Trade Unions held an all-city conference for the workers of the field of illiteracy and semi-literacy. During it Gevorg Kurulov, the head of the Cultural Department of the Council of Trade Unions, made a speech about the positive and negative aspects of their work and the necessity for improving it further. I myself spoke about the work of the trade unions.

After the conference was over, Gevorg Kurulov and the head of the Cultural Department of the Trade Union of Food and Taste, Vahagn Meliksetian, invited me to collaborate with the Cultural Department of the Council of Trade Unions as head of the Sub-Department of Schools. I agreed as that work was again connected with trade unions. Now I was to head all their activities, all the cultural departments passing into my jurisdiction. Apart from adult groups, the trade unions also had a lot of kindergartens, adult schools and various groups which were to be under my supervision. My work entered a new path and I harnessed myself to my new duties with fresh efforts and enthusiasm. Now I was entirely connected with trade unions. My ties with party-affiliated organisations grew closer. I visited the

district and central committees very often, a fact that enabled me not only to get acquainted with the trade unions' movement, but also go deeper in its history starting with the foundation of trade unions and reaching our days. I studied the history of the spread of literacy, but first and foremost, that of party congresses. Then I started studying the club and library activities. In those times, trade unions were quite influential and carried out multilateral work. A trade union employee gained experience and his work was properly assessed, either positively or negatively, during general meetings. I gradually became more and more skilled, acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge and improving my profession parallel with the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy. Now I myself headed the circles of literacy teaching. Although I was entirely absorbed in the work of trade unions, my primary occupation remained the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy.

A considerable part of the burden of this work was borne by the local organisations of the Komsomol, trade unions and pioneers.

The abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy had reached such an extent that it was difficult to find a factory or establishment lacking groups of literacy learners. We had schools of the first class of literacy which also taught other subjects (they were attached to numerous production enterprises). Later these establishments developed into acquiring a special status so that separate curricula were elaborated for them. These schools consisted of two classes, one for the illiterate and the other for the semi-literate. I find it expedient to present their curriculum below:

	For the Illiterate		For the Semi-Literate	
	Hours	total	Hours	total
1. Mother tongue	5	100	5	150
2. Arithmetics	4	80	4	120
3. Municipal Literacy Teaching	2	40	2	60
4. Geography and Natural Science	2	40	2	60
5. Technology and Agronomy	2	40	2	60
Total	15	300	15	450

Indeed, such kind of schools were established at large factories and establishments.

The abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy acquired a large scale amidst women as well.

In Tiflis the illiterate and semi-literate learnt to read and write in Georgian, Armenian, Russian, Azerbaijani, Ossetian, Assyrian and Kurdish.

After some time, we held graduation exams for our groups of literacy learning and at the first-level schools. This gave rise to the necessity of establishing



so-called higher schools for students who had completed their course in these groups, and for those of the first-level schools. These “higher” schools were quite different from first-level ones as they did not have any illiterate pupils, and their curriculums of the language and arithmetics were larger in number. Apart from this, we also established schools of another type for adults with curricula of secondary schools. Among them can be mentioned the workers’ faculties, the workers’ universities and secondary (night) schools.

According to a 1924 decision of the Government, the educational establishments within the jurisdiction of trade unions, as well as the adult groups and kindergartens passed into the jurisdiction of the bodies of people’s enlightenment. This decision, which stipulated the liquidation of the Sub-Department of Schools within the Cultural Department of the Council of Trade Unions, was taken just in time. But what about me? Bagrat Machidze, the Director of the Council of Trade Unions, asked me where I wanted to work. I was unwilling to return to the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment as while working there (during a business trip to Akhaltskha), I fell seriously ill with jaundice and remained consigned to bed throughout four months. I asked him to send me to Tiflis’ Municipal Department of People’s Education.

#### **A Worker of Tiflis’ Municipal Department of People’s Education**

Korneli Alexeyevich Katsabava, the head of the Department of People’s Education, received me very warmly. At that time the departments of people’s education also carried out mass work in the field of municipal enlightenment so that he appointed me deputy head of the Department of Municipal Enlightenment with the same duties that I had on the Council of Trade Unions.

I found myself in a new environment, but it did not matter much as the field of my activities remained the same. In the Municipal Department of People’s Education, I retained ties with trade unions. In many cases, I was entrusted with heading the literacy circles at this or that local committee, etc. Now history repeated itself. In daytime I fulfilled my duties, while in the evenings I headed the work of the circles organised by trade unions. The issue of textbooks for Armenian-language circles had become a true problem. We had long run out of the notorious one entitled *Towards Light*. The children’s books, intended for the first form, could not be used because of their contents and small number. The Department of People’s Education charged several Armenian teachers with compiling an ABC book for adults, but this initiative proved futile. I was obliged to try my abilities in that work. I gathered together many textbooks (in Russian, Georgian and Armenian), got

acquainted with their contents and structure and made up a primary book for the illiterate entitled *Labour* (it was published in 1925 with 10,000 copies). Indeed, that textbook had certain drawbacks, but it also had its positive aspects: it was made up in accordance with the method of sounds and its contents were arranged to suit adults’ psychology. We soon ran out of this textbook and had to re-publish it the following year in a revised edition of 5,000 copies.

I was the only person amidst the Armenians of Tiflis that was overburdened with the work relating to the enlightenment of the municipal population. We were in bad need of party-affiliated employees: those already collaborating with us were busy with work of greater responsibility so that the non-party-affiliated but trustworthy employees were extremely overburdened with mass work.

One day I was in the Cultural Department of the Council of Trade Unions to discuss some issues with Gevorg Kurulov. He introduced me to two people who had come from Armenia, Petya Kuznetsov, the Director of the Council of Armenia’s Trade Unions, and Hovhannes Petrossian, the head of the Cultural Department of this Council. During our conversation, they invited me to Yerevan to organise and head courses for trade union employees.

“It’s impossible,” I said. “Nobody will permit me to leave my work here and go to Yerevan.”

“And what about the summer-time when you are on holiday?” Petya Kuznetsov asked.

“Well, that might be possible.”

In the summer of 1926, I was already in Armenia. From all the districts of the country, 44 trade unionists had gathered, 28 of them party-affiliated. We held classes in Tzaghkadzor. Apart from me, Hayk Azatian and Khoren Hovsepian delivered lectures for the students. Proving highly successful in this two-month course, I got an invitation for the next summer to head the courses of the employees of the Municipal Department of Enlightenment that were to last only a month. They were to be held in Yerevan, with composer Martin Mazmanian and teacher of painting Vagharshak Ghazarian, composer Daniel Ghazarian’s brother, delivering lectures during them.

#### **Teaching Subjects of Municipal Enlightenment**

As early as 1924 to 1925, each of our schools had chosen a specialised course for the purpose of training future specialists: pedagogues, doctors, mechanics, electricians, technicians, etc. Armenian secondary school no. 70 (in Tiflis), housed in the former Third Gymnasium for Females, was to train workers for the field of municipal enlightenment (it had a laboratory, special rooms and a rich library). The main subjects taught at that school were: 1. the abolition of illiteracy

and semi-literacy; 2. club work, and 3. library activities. It was very difficult to find a teacher able to teach these subjects so that after a long-lasting search, the headmaster, Anna Ter-Ghevondian, composer Anushavan Ter-Ghevondian's sister, suggested that I assume that duty. I could not accept her proposal as the lessons coincided with my working hours. Several days later, Korneli Alexeyevich Katsabava called me to him.

"Dear Sergo, you know that the lessons of school no. 70 cannot be held, do you not?"

"Korneli Alexeyevich, what can I do?"

"I want you to teach the major subjects at that school."

"How can I do so at my working hours? Let them change their specialisation if they do not find an appropriate specialist. Who said that it is obligatory for that school to specialise in municipal enlightenment?"

"You may be absent from work two hours a day and you may be a little late for work in the morning."

I agreed as I did not want to reject that kind-hearted meek old man's proposal. Katsabava was a brilliant person. We worked together for thirteen years, and during that period, I never saw him angry or speaking in a loud voice. He was a skilled specialist who knew the school and everything connected with it very well.

Well, I agreed, but I had neither a curriculum nor an appropriate manual at hand. I did not know what contents those three different subjects were to have. Specialisation in municipal enlightenment and nothing else. Go and have a hundred hours of lessons in the 8th and 9th forms (at that time, secondary education comprised a nine-year course) without any supporting manual. What could I do? Once I had taken the proposal, I myself had to think over all that and I spent sleepless nights to compile curricula on the basis of a thousand sources.

With the ready curriculum in my hand, I entered the classroom with great confidence. Our classes were very interesting: the pupils had their practice in the school library and in the attached circles of the illiterate and semi-literate. They also issued a wall newspaper.

We reached new achievements in our work of abolishing illiteracy and semi-literacy. Even Kurdish and Azerbaijani women were admitted to our circles. Parallel with all that, first-level schools were established for illiterate and semi-literate children. On the other hand, the graduates of the high-level schools were now so large in number that it became an imperative to found a secondary school for them. It was called a *secondary night school for adults*.

### **I Become Headmaster of the Secondary Night School for Adults**

As of 1928, Tiflis already had an Armenian workers' faculty and a workers' university. Along with that,

we opened the first secondary night school for workers with 30 classes and Armenian, Russian, Georgian and Azerbaijani departments. It was situated in the house of former male gymnasium no. 5, District of 26 Commissars. The task of organising everything connected with the activity of this night school was entirely vested in me. When I was through with it, Katsabava called me and told me that I had been appointed headmaster of that school.

"I can find no other person more suitable for that post than you," he said. "You know Armenian, Russian, Azerbaijani and Georgian, more or less. You have to give up all your past-dinner work; otherwise, it will be very difficult for you to manage everything."

Without waiting for my consent, he called the secretary and told him to formulate a corresponding order on my appointment to the post of headmaster of Workers' Secondary School No. 3 with a salary ...and an additional 25 percent for my work in its departments.

"A mouse can hardly squeeze itself into a hole but still, it has to take a broom there!"<sup>27</sup>

"What do you mean?"

I explained the meaning of the Armenian proverb to Katsabava, who began laughing.

"It's all right. Our work is such."

That school was not an ordinary one. It was a unisex establishment, with pupils aged from 18 to 30 and above. Its four departments had 800 pupils together. The teachers amounted to 60, few of them having a higher education. The largest of the departments was the Armenian one and the smallest the Azerbaijani. The pedagogical meetings were held for all the teachers together. My being appointed headmaster of that secondary night school made me abandon all my past-dinner work connected with trade unions. Despite my being overburdened, I continued working in the Municipal Department of People's Education and teaching all the major subjects at school no. 70.

### **The Working Groups Engaged in Compiling Text-Books**

In 1928 the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment set up two working groups for compiling textbooks of Armenian and publishing them in Georgia. The first of them was to prepare textbooks for primary schools and for those illiterate and semi-literate. The author of these lines was appointed head of this group. The second one was to make up textbooks of the Armenian language and literature for the 5th to 10th forms of the secondary school. Its head was Hayk Hovakimian (Norayr), a teacher of literature in the Workers' Department and the head of the section of the *Martakoch* newspaper.

<sup>27</sup> It is said with reference to a very busy person who is being overburdened with work again and again all the time - translator.

Our group of three (G. Messian, K. Aghababian and S. Israelian) made up and published four textbooks: the revised version of the ABC book entitled *Our Path* that I myself had initially compiled (it had three editions); *Good Pupil* for the semi-literate (it had two editions), and two types of *Mother Tongue* for the third and fourth forms of public schools.

Another group, consisting of Hasanzade and Aliyev, was to make up Azerbaijani textbooks. The former, who was my close friend, came to me one day and said:

“Sergo, we can’t do anything. We can’t even make up a primer.”

“Why?” I was surprised.

“It’s true. We can’t do anything and I’ve come to ask you to help us.”

“Well, I’ll help you on condition that my sister Hajizar (his wife) should make some tasty *pilav* for us,” I joked.

“Well, you only come. *Pilav* is not a problem at all.”

With my participation, this group compiled a textbook for the illiterate entitled *Lenin’s Path*: it was published in 1932 and had two editions (compilers: Aliyev, Israelian, Hasanzade).

#### **Tiflis Declared a City of Universal Literacy**

As of 1932, the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy was coming to an end, which was attested by the achievements we reached in our work day by day and the establishment of secondary schools; moreover, even Kurdish and Turkish housewives were already learning to read and write.

The Municipal Department of People’s Education wanted to declare Tiflis a city having absolutely no illiterate inhabitants. Its head, K. Katsabava, made a speech on this issue on the Municipal Council of Tiflis, but its President Bagrat Machidze objected saying that it was still early to make such a decision. The consideration of the issue was assigned to the Municipal Committee, which decided first to verify the state of the work for the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy in all the parts of the city and only then take a decision. This was carried out with the participation of Comrades Obuladze, the head of the Section of Propaganda and Agitation within the Municipal Committee, Katsabava, the head of the Municipal Department of Education and myself. The results proving positive, on 20 April 1932, after listening to Comrade Katsabava’s report, the Municipal Executive Committee decided to declare Tiflis a city entirely populated by literate people.

On this occasion, the Municipal Council of Tiflis, the Council of Trade Unions and the Volunteers’ Society for the Abolition of Illiteracy and Semi-Literacy together submitted reports to Moscow, to Comrade Meladze, First Secretary of the Government of Georgia,

and to People’s Commissar of Enlightenment Maria Orakhelashvili.

Tiflis’ Municipal Department of Education prepared special badges of silver which were conferred on the most prominent cultural workers, including a venerable old man, our distinguished composer Christopher Kara-Murza’s brother.

Many cultural workers also received diplomas and other awards.

In special commemoration of this declaration, it was decided to publish an illustrated Russian-language booklet entitled *Tiflis: A City of Universal Literacy*. For the realisation of this, a three-member editorial staff was elected comprising Prof. Tzereteli, V. Mayilian, the head of the Municipal Department of Enlightenment within the Department of People’s Education, and the author of these lines. It saw the light in May 1932. A booklet of an international character with materials in Georgian, Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani, it included five of my articles, one of them in Armenian.

After this declaration, my burden of work was alleviated.

I also finished the teaching of the major subjects at school no. 70, having two graduates within five years. One of them, Zabel Tevanian, writes the following in her article entitled “*Pages from My Diary*” and published in the *Avangard* newspaper in 1968 (no. 9, 7428).

“It was April, and the school year was coming to an end. In those days, Comrade Israelian seemed to have grown younger and more enthusiastic.

“Filled with great enthusiasm, he was calling on us to ‘go to the remote villages of darkness and harness ourselves to their enlightenment and socialistic reconstruction...’ Thus, I completed my course at Tiflis school no. 70 with excellent marks...”

“On 28 July, with the mediation of the authorities of Tiflis, I was sent to the district of Akhalkalak on a business trip... At 8 o’clock on the morning of 30 July, the heads of cabin lessons gathered for their re-training courses.

“My happiness was beyond description when I learnt that Comrade Israelian was there. Our lesson proved very interesting. I answered all the questions as I had learnt everything. After a six-hour lesson, we went to dinner.

“At 8 o’clock on 7 August, we started our practical training... I had a headache after the long work. ...I made a mistake, but Comrade Israelian got angry with the others for having overburdened me with work. Turning to me, he said: ‘Never mind. Mistakes are avoided only by those who do nothing.’”

Zabel Tevanian then spoke about the unspeakable suffering and privations she had to go through while working in the cabin/reading hall of Vache Village and thus having her own share of contribution in the noble work of spreading enlightenment there.



When I worked in the field of municipal enlightenment within Tiflis' Department of People's Education, Comrade Katsabava always asked me to accompany him during his visits to national schools. At that time, Tiflis had more than a hundred schools which fell into the following classification according to their numbers:

- 1 Georgian: nos. 1-39
- 2 Russian: nos. 40-69
- 3 Armenian: nos. 70-95
- 4 Azerbaijani: nos. 96-97
- 5 School of Kazan's Tatars: no. 98
- 6 Greek: no. 100
- 7 German: no. 99
- 8 Ossetian: no. 101.

After 1932 two Kurdish schools and an Assyrian one (no. 105) opened in the city, the headmaster of this last one being Abraham Simonov, a former inspector of Kars District.

From 1928 onwards, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment unfailingly sent me to Akhalkalak or some other district every summer to head the lessons of the employees of the field of municipal enlightenment. In 1929, along with that work, I also had classes for the teachers having re-training courses in Akhalkalak. One year I spent both my summer and winter holidays in Akhalkalak, together with Sonia Mayilian, the school inspectress of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment. Our task was to check how work proceeded at the local Armenian schools, my impressions and the results of this trip being summarised in an article entitled "The State of Armenian Schools in Akhalkalak District." It was published in the *Martakoch* newspaper, in which an entire page was allocated to it.

I had enough free time now. After 1933 no Armenian textbooks were published in Georgia (in general, all national schools received textbooks from their own republics).

I had also finished my work at specialised school no. 70, and all my attention and care were focused on the secondary night school of adults. None of its sixty teachers came to work earlier than me and none of them went home later than me. I had established strongest order and discipline at the school. Once, during the break, when the pupils were in the yard, I was looking out of the window. A young fellow kept pulling a girl's hair and wanted to drag her. The girl started screaming. I knocked at the window and called the boy in. He came and stood before me with his head bowed down, as he realised his guilt.

"Why are you pulling the girl's hair?"

"We're just playing."

"Well done! You make the girl scream and say that you're playing! What would you do if your sister were in her place? Only tell me sincerely. Wouldn't you slap the boy?"

"I would," he replied.

"So I can slap you, can't I?"

"Yes, you can."

"Now go. Never again treat girls like that."

Several years later, somebody approached me in Yerevan and said:

"Hello, Comrade Israelian. Don't you recognise me? I was your pupil at the night school of adults. I'm Aram Grigorian."

"I'm very glad to see you. I didn't think you might be one of my pupils."

"Our guys in Tiflis always remember you and so do I. I especially remember how once I asked you to allow me to miss the lessons after the first one, but you rejected saying that if you permitted me, that might be a bad example for the others. I said that I would go anyway. You said, 'If you're going to miss the lessons without my permission, why are you asking me for it?'"

"Well, did you go anyway?" I asked.

"No, how could I? I attended all the lessons of that day."

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In those years, Tiflis had a serious problem connected with electric illumination. Electricity would suddenly be cut off throughout the quarter and you had to wait for it for hours. Being aware of this, I had asked our electrician to connect the electricity of our school with that of the street for the classes to proceed without any obstacles. When the teachers saw that the entire quarter was in darkness, they grew happy thinking that they would not have any lessons because of that. But to their surprise, throughout the darkness encompassing the quarter, the school house proved to be the only building to have electricity. None of them could guess this secret, except Magradze, the teacher of physics in the Georgian department who still remembers me and always sends me greetings with teachers whom both of us know.

#### **A Representative of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment in Five Border Districts**

In December 1935, the Municipal Department of People's Education got a note from Georgia's People's Commissariat of Enlightenment which stated that in accordance with the order of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, Comrade Israelian was appointed as a representative of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment in five border districts: Akhaltskha, Akhalkalak, Bogdanovka, Aspindza and Adigen. I was to assume that post on 15 December for a one-year term with a salary of 1,300 roubles. Comrade Katsabava called me, extended the note to me and said:

"Read it."

I read the note.

"Well, what is your opinion? I do not agree to it."

“If you do not agree, Korneli Alexeyevich, I do not agree either.”

“Why on earth should you go to those remote places, dear Sergo? Why? Do you not boast high repute here? Is your salary small? It is already 13 years since we started working together and we have never discredited ourselves. I have been offered the post of People’s Commissar of Enlightenment for several times, but I have always preferred Tiflis’ Department of Enlightenment rather than the high-flown title of People’s Commissar of Enlightenment. So neither you agree nor me. Go and continue doing your work.”

The People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment had made that decision without consulting Katsabava and asking my opinion.

However, our refusal did not change anything as I kept receiving phone calls from that Commissariat and giving evasive answers. But how long could all that continue? Sometimes I flatly refused to take up that post. I could not put up with the thought of abandoning the school for adults. I was between the devil and the deep blue sea. I became so tired of all that fuss that sometimes I just wanted to accept that proposal no matter whatever happened afterwards. However, when I remembered Korneli Alexeyevich’s kind and affectionate face, I gave up that idea. All this bustle lasted for a month and a half.

On 5 February 1936, I was called to the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment to meet People’s Commissar Tatarashvili. I was told there that I was to go to the accountant. “Perhaps, there is some misunderstanding concerning the prepayment of my business trips.” With this thought, I went to the accountant.

“What is the matter?” I asked Accountant General Khorbeladze.

“Come here, Sergei Yakovlevich (the employees of the Commissariat addressed me in this way),” the cashier said.

I approached the pay desk. The cashier took out the wage sheet and asked me to sign it.

“What is this?” I asked.

“It is your salary, 1,950 roubles.”

“What are you talking about? I have not assumed work yet.”

I looked at the accountant general.

“I do not know anything,” he said. “I have been given the Commissar’s order and told to write out a salary for a month and a half. You had better sign it. It is bad to disobey the Commissar’s order.”

Some inner voice told me to sign the wage sheet. I did so, took the money and hurried home.

“What money is this? Where’ve you got it from?” Maro asked in surprise. “Armenian textbooks are no longer published in Georgia, are they? You don’t get any honorarium. What a puzzle is this?”

“Some charitable person gave it for us to buy oil and rice and cook *pilav*” (this phrase is taken from an Armenian fairy tale - translator).

“Don’t make a joke. Tell me the truth.”

“It’s a bribe, honey, a bribe.”

“Tell me the truth or else I’ll burn it right away.”

I told Maro what had happened.

“And what’re you going to tell Comrade Katsabava?”

“I don’t know.” I lay on the ottoman with my face downwards.

The following day I entered Katsabava’s room in utter perplexity and stood before him like a child realising the guilt he has committed.

“Well, what is the matter? Why are you sad?”

I told him everything.

“Well, what can we do? Go if you have decided so. May God be with you. Good luck. Have you told them that you are planning to return to your post as soon as the term expires?”

“Of course, Korneli Alexeyevich. I have and Gabisonia agreed to it.”

I sighed a sigh of relief.

In the evening the adults’ school was at a fuss. Everybody discussed my new appointment. A number of students had gathered at my room to say good-bye to me. The teachers with whom I had been working in peace and unity throughout eight years wanted to hold a farewell party. I was against that idea, but they *did* organise it in the flat of Safarian, the physics teacher of the Armenian department.

Having nothing else to do, I was getting ready to leave for my new place of work.

On 5 February 1936, I arrived in Akhaltskha. I thought it my duty to first of all go to the District Commissariat, the First Secretary of which was an Azerbaijani, a certain Sultanov. There I came across Military Commissar Sergei Chkheidze, whose jurisdiction spread over three districts, Akhaltskha, Aspindza and Adigen. Comrade Sultanov was very glad to hear about my new appointment.

“It is very good. You will help me make my illiterate recruits learn to read and write,” he said.

“With great pleasure, as it is my main work here,” I said.

Military Commissar Chkheidze allocated a room for my office in one of the local buildings. When I later bought a horse, he gave it a place in his own stable and I had only to pay a small monthly amount to the groom for taking care of it.

First and foremost, I employed an accountant, a technical worker and two instructors, one an Armenian and the other a Turk. During a consultation held with the participation of the heads of the district departments of people’s education, we decided to spend the week registering all those illiterate and semi-literate. I

established a central school for illiterate and semi-literate recruits who amounted to 120. I also set a monthly scholarship of 30 roubles for each of them and invited skilled teachers, providing the school with textbooks and stationery. Military Commissar Chkheidze was very pleased with me...

Then I started holding conferences in the districts, delivering lectures on illiteracy and calling upon everybody to carry out Lenin's slogan ("Learn, learn, learn") within a short time. Other speakers included the heads of the Departments of Agitation and Propaganda and school headmasters. Military Commissar Chkheidze was always with me during these conferences, his speeches contributing to our work. Three of the districts where I worked were inhabited by Azerbaijanians. In Akhaltskha 16 of the 72 villages were Armenian; each of the districts of Adigen and Aspindza had only a single Georgian (Ude) and Armenian (Tamala) village respectively so that the abolition of illiteracy and semi-literacy was mainly to be carried out amidst the Turkish population.

The organisation of circles for the illiterate and semi-literate was in full swing. The work of the departments of people's education was appreciated. Summarising the results of the monitoring carried out by inspectors, I held conferences which were of great contribution to our work as we discussed the positive and negative results of our efforts. Everybody did their best to receive positive assessment as none of them wanted to be reproached in the presence of the Secretary of the District Commissariat (he always attended these conferences).

At this busy time of work, we received protests from the Azerbaijani villages that the circles of the illiterate had no textbooks. The work was about to suffer failure. What was I to do...? Georgia no longer published textbooks for national schools; nor did Azerbaijan send any. We had run out of the copies of the primer entitled *Lenin's Path*. The work was truly to be frustrated and there was nobody to help us...

Riza Shahveladov, the headmaster of secondary school no. 96 in Tiflis (he was also known as a poet), was appointed head of the Department of People's Education in Adigen District. As I had been on very close terms with him since the days of my work in Tiflis, I went to Adigen to meet him.

"I am unable to help you, Sergo Dayi (the Azerbaijanians addressed me with the word 'dayi' in token of respect)."

"Riza, let's make up a small ABC book together," I said.

"But who will allow us that? And who will publish it?" Riza asked.

"Let's go to the First Secretary of the District Commissariat, Rati Khan."

After listening to us, Rati Khan said: "If it is necessary for your work and you can compile the textbook, do it. We shall print it in our printing-house."

Throughout ten days and nights, we worked together, the result of our heavy efforts being a small primer of 48 pages. The printing-office abandoned all its work and started printing it with 2,000 copies (the textbook was just called ABC book).

Now the Azerbaijani circles had textbooks and I was very happy about it. However, my satisfaction was not to last long as a new problem arose: the Turkish women did not attend classes because the teachers were men.

"A Turk's wife should not study with a man," the women and their husbands said.

I was in confusion. What was I to do? I went to Arif Sadekhov, the director of Akhaltskha's Azerbaijani Teachers Training Technical School.

"Dear Arif, what can I do? Where can I find Turkish women teachers?"

Arif fell into thoughts. There were four girls among the graduates of the school who were going to complete their course in May or June.

"Can we hold training courses for women teachers?" I asked.

"Yes, we can," Arif said after some thought.

We succeeded in organising three courses for Turkish women teachers with the help of the headmasters of secondary schools. About 100 Turkish women started attending them. The teachers were the school headmasters who worked with a monthly salary of 120 roubles, the scholarship of the women students amounting to 70 roubles.

Our monitoring, however, revealed that these women did not attend classes even when the teachers were female. What could I do? I was just going mad. They were not small children for me to speak to their parents or get angry with them. "My God, what am I to do now? I have provided them with books and a woman teacher. What else do they want?"

I could not find any way out. I was in a nervous strain, but I was unable to decide anything.

At night an idea was born in my mind and in the morning I set out for Tiflis. I went directly to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment.

"I shall go back only if you give me 30 sewing machines and 1,500 metres of chintz; or else I will not return," I said in a strict and sharp tone.

Those present started laughing at me.

"We cannot procure even a single sewing machine for ourselves while this man is demanding 30!"

"I'm not joking and I didn't say it to make you laugh..."

After a long-lasting conversation and argument, I succeeded in getting 15 sewing machines with 1,000



metres of chintz and returned to Akhaltskha with that luggage. I held a consultation with the participation of the heads of the departments of people's education of the Azerbaijani districts. We decided to establish 15 schools of sewing in 15 major villages of these districts, distributing the chintz I had brought among them. Now I had to search for 15 Turkish women who knew sewing. I managed to employ 4 Turkish and 11 Armenian women with such skills with a monthly salary of 100 roubles. I declared that the schools were to admit only those women who would learn to read and write. After that statement, an influx of Turkish women started into the circles formed at the sewing schools.

At last I could breathe a sigh of relief: Turkish women were beginning to learn reading and writing. I continued this work until May 1937, after which I held the last conference with the participation of about 75 people. After it, in celebration of the final abolition of illiteracy, I held a reception in Akhaltskha and we got photographed.

It was June 1937. Considering my mission completely fulfilled, I prepared an extensive, 112-page account of my work and submitted it to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment together with a financial report. Every 3 months I invited the accountants of the bank and Executive Committee to hold an audit of the expenditures and collect all the appropriate acts together. It was suggested that I continue my work in Akhaltskha for another year, but I refused saying that those districts no longer needed the help of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. I had to return to the Municipal Department of People's Education although those in the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment thought otherwise.

"You should not go to the Municipal Department of People's Education; instead, you could stay here and work for us."

I asked for two days to think over that proposal. When home, I discussed it with my wife.

"How are you going to the Municipal Department of People's Education? Who is there now? Everybody has been banished: Katsabava, Ibrayilidze, the head of the Schools Department, Gorgadze and first and foremost, Bagrat Machidze, the head of the Municipal Executive Committee. Thank God you weren't here; or else you must have been among them. Give your consent and stay in the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment."

### **Working for the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment**

I started working in the Main Department of Municipal Enlightenment within the People's

Commissariat of Enlightenment, my activities being connected with national minorities in ten districts, including border ones, Borchalu, Gharayaz, Tzalka, Luxemburg, Bashkiket as well as the Republic of Abkhazia and the autonomous region of South Ossetia. My work was extremely heavy as I had to supervise activities in 19 districts. I was incessantly on business trips. Having hardly managed to prepare a report on the work, proposals and events relating to one business trip, I already received an order for the next one. I had visited all these districts for so many times that those in Akhalkalak said it was my second homeland, while in South Ossetia I was regarded as a "brother-in-law" on the basis of the historical fact that King Artashes kidnapped Satenik, the daughter of the Alans' king, from the area on the river Kur.

Despite my being extremely overburdened with work, I still managed to unfold some literary activity. Thus, in 1940 I published an Armenian-language methodological manual on *Language and Literature Teaching at Adults' Schools*. In the same year, the *Grakan Tert (Literary Newspaper)* published my essay entitled "Ghazaros Aghayan."

In 1943 I published two Armenian-language booklets: *To Use the Entire Work of the Establishments of Municipal Enlightenment for the Patriotic War and Fascism is the Bitter Enemy of Humanity and Culture*.

In 1945, with the mediation of Ar. Khachikian, Armenia's People's Commissar of Enlightenment, I moved to my homeland, where my children, architect Raphael Israelian and chemistry teacher Laura Israelian, lived.

Now I am 90 years old, but my physical and mental abilities still enable me to work. I retired at 75, after which I compiled:

- 1 an explanatory dictionary of words used in Karabakh dialect (about 10,000 words);
- 2 a work on the peculiarities of Karabakh dialect (64 pages, not larger than A4 format);
- 3 a work on the popular expressions and metaphorical phrases found in Karabakh dialect (about 1,000 phrases);
- 4 a book of aphorisms, sayings, fables, folk tales, etc. (240 pages, not larger than A4 format);
- 5 ethnographical materials (160 pages, not larger than A4 format).

The institutes of Armenia's National Academy of Sciences have taken all these works for publication.

At this point, I am ending my memoirs.

# RAA NEW PROJECTS

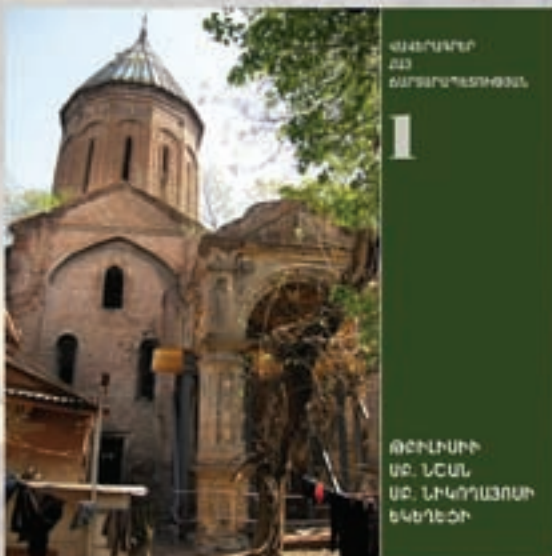
In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Great Armenian Genocide of 1915 and in token of deepest respect of the memory of its innocent victims, the RAA intends to complete its decades-long research in Western Armenia in 2015 and present the history of its over 70 districts in 36 volumes.



The members of the RAA are also preparing a series of publications on the history and material culture of the towns and villages of Artsakh.



## RAA NEW PUBLICATIONS



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We also owe a debt of gratitude to the editorial staffs of the "Aramazd," "Patmabanasirakan" and "Aniv" periodicals for the donation of all their issues to the RAA library.





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