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THE ISSUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE IRANIAN- ARMENIAN COMMUNITY (2000–2004)

Key words: the Armenian community of Iran, higher education, students, Iranian universities, admission, profession, Islamic Azad University.

Introduction

For different parts of the Armenian Diaspora, having a community of highly qualified professionals is undoubtedly of great importance for the progress of the society of the residence country. However, this process requires will and determination of the Armenian applicants to overcome certain linguistic, legal and other obstacles.

The Armenian community of Iran has a certain level of education, which can first be considered in the context of the Iranian educational system and its peculiarities. That is why, based on objective conditions, the issue should be considered in the light of the possibilities offered by the country in the field of education.

Accordingly, in order to meet the higher educational needs, Armenian youth is mainly educated in Iranian universities though some Iranian-Armenian young people also choose to study at Armenian universities. Specializing in Armenology at the Islamic Azad Universities of Isfahan and Tehran was a widely practised choice in the community during the years in question. In the recent years, unfortunately, Armenians do not display interest in studying in the departments of the mentioned universities, while Persian students, on the contrary, do.

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A certain number of Iranian-Armenian youth participate in the courses of Armenian studies organized by the Armenian Diocese of Tehran though these learners do not have the official status of students in state universities.

It should be noted that the Diocesan Council of the Armenian Diocese of Tehran focuses on the issues of programs meant to develop the Armenian language studies, namely – evening courses of the diocese, compilation of textbooks, raising the educational level of the center. As a result of all that, the new program of the Armenian language courses in Tehran was borrowed from Khachatur Abovyan Pedagogical Institute on July 20, 2004¹.

Nevertheless, taking into account the peculiarities of the state policy towards the community, as well as the employment of the Armenians in different branches of the country's economy, especially in crafts, it can be said that since 1979, from the Islamic Revolution on, appointments to high positions are virtually excluded from the community. The application of this unwritten law explains the scarcity of applicants from the community for some university specialties. In other words, the restriction of religious minorities, including the Armenians, in the Iranian state system has a certain effect on the choice of professions in universities. It should be noted that the Armenian community in Iran prevails in number (about 70%) over the other communities of religious minorities.

Admission Procedure at the Iranian Universities

The implementation of the Islamic program of universities on the basis of the Islamic Cultural Revolution started from 1980². According to this approach, 2 levels have been differentiated in the educational process of the universities: *cardani*, i.e. incomplete higher education, for a period of 3–3.5 years the graduates of which receive a bachelor's incomplete degree, and a complete education course lasting 6–6.5 years, and the graduates are awarded a full bachelor's degree³.

To enter the university, applicants take exams in professional and general education subjects. These are the Persian and Arabic languages, the Islamic

¹ Հաղորդագրություն ԹՀ թեմական խորհրդի գործունեության, 30 մայիսի առ 21 սեպտեմբերի, 2004 թ., Ալիք, 10.10.2004:

² Բայբուրյան 2005, 719:

³ Բադալյան 2011, 339:

enlightenment, a foreign (European) language, an interview on socio-political issues⁴.

The conditions for admission to postgraduate studies are the same as those for entering a university: adherence to Islam or one of the official religions of Iran, adoption or observance of the provisions of the Constitution, non-membership in any anti-Islamic party or group other than the Party of God ("Hezbollah")⁵.

It is obvious that the above-mentioned requirements in any case present certain difficulties for the Armenian community, which is a Christian religious minority.

If we are to assess the state of education of the Armenian community in Tehran and other cities, it should be noted that in general it is high (especially in natural sciences). Graduates of Armenian schools, as a rule, are capable of being admitted to Iranian and foreign universities on the basis of the knowledge acquired at school, while the learning of religious minorities in Iranian universities is implemented on a general basis⁶.

Some Armenian high school graduates prefer to study in Armenian universities. For example, in 2004 there were 2,000 Iranian students studying in Armenia, 800 of whom were Iranian-Armenians⁷. Most of them (children of well-to-do families) seek education in Europe, the USA, Canada and other developed countries⁸. There is a huge difference between the number of high school graduates and university applicants in Iran. Therefore, even talented young Armenians do not manage to enter state universities. It is quite difficult for young Iranians to overcome the conditions of the competition and enter universities⁹.

The Islamic Azad University, known for its many branches in different cities of the country, is relatively accessible to the Armenian youth.

The best universities in the country are Tehran State University, Tehran National University, the universities of Shiraz, Tabriz, Kermanshah, Kerman, Isfahan, Dr. Beheshti University of Tehran, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Sharif

⁴ **Բալբուրյան** 1999, 225:

⁵ **Բալբուրյան** 1999, 226:

⁶ **Բալբուրյան** 2013, 99:

⁷ **Թադևոսյան** 2005, 56:

⁸ **Բալբուրյան** 2013, 100:

⁹ **Բալբուրյան** 2013, 138:

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University of Technology¹⁰ as well as Khaje Nasireddin Toosi University of Technology.

Admission to Islamic Azad University is the same as to any other university in Iran. Students at that University have the right to be a free listener. The students receive a corresponding certificate, which, however, is not equal to the diploma of a university graduate. In addition, because tuition at this university is free, its students do not receive privileges for exemption from military service or deferment¹¹.

Admission to state universities largely depends on the results of the so-called *concur* national examination. Among the state universities, the Islamic Azad University offers only one alternative – its high tuition fees¹².

It should be noted that in 2000–2004 many Iranian-Armenians passed the annual entrance exams of Iranian universities. Compared to the percentage of the Armenian community, the number of students admitted to universities was on average 200, which was considered a good indicator¹³.

The Issue of University Specialty of Iranian Armenians

A possible source of information about the higher education level of the Armenian community in Iran is the number of successful entrants who pass the entrance exams and the competition with high marks. At the same time, they reveal the professions and abilities preferred by the Armenian youth. However, as mentioned, some professions are not available to them because the conditions of the competition are very hard.

Here are some interesting statistical data. Thus, in the academic year of 2001–2002, 323 Armenian applicants were admitted to Iranian universities, of which 75 were in Armenian language and literature, 37 in foreign languages, 17 in accounting, trade administration, 7 in chemistry, and 4 in Physics, 2 in Political Science, 1 in Economics and in other specialties¹⁴.

¹⁰ Թաղևոսյան 2005, 55:

¹¹ Բայբուրդյան 1999, 226:

¹² Farrokhi-Khajeh-Pasha, Y., Nedjat, (2012). The validity of Iran's national university entrance examination (Konkour) for predicting medical students' academic performance. BMC medical education, 12(1), 60. <https://bmcmmededuc.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6920-12-60> դիտվել է 22.06.2021:

¹³ Ալիք, 12.10.2004:

¹⁴ Ալիք, Յանելյան, հոկտեմբեր, 2001 և 03.11.2001:

In addition, 40 students were admitted to the master's degree departments of the mentioned university, of which 27 to accounting and economics, 5 to computer science, 3 to construction, 1 to mining and production expertise, 1 to electronics, 1 to mechanics, 1 to physical education. In fact, in this case, the majors in economics prevailed. Instead, some specialties were completely absent during university admissions. This is borne out by the fact that in the large pages of university admissions we could not find any names of Armenian applicants admitted to specialize, for example in law, in military science, etc... This fact gives grounds to conclude that the mentioned professions are by an unwritten law unavailable to the community. Hence, the applicants did not show any interest in them.

On the basis of the fact that in 2000 the graduates of Iranian-Armenian secondary schools were 2378 people¹⁵, it turns out that up to 15% of them were admitted to Iranian universities.

Moreover, the Armenian entrants successfully passed the exams and were admitted to the Islamic Azad University in Tehran (central) as well as to the branches of Zahedan, Kerman, Neyriz, Karaj, Varamin, Rudehen, Isfahan Jihad, Allameh Tabataba and other universities in Tehran.

It should be noted that the General Union of Armenian University Students and the Armenian Public Union of Tehran, the Armenian Club, come up with an incentive initiative to evaluate graduates with higher education in the community.

On May 19, 2000, on the initiative of the above-mentioned Union, an evening party dedicated to higher education graduates and students was organized in the hall of the Armenian Club, during which 3 postgraduate students were awarded gold medals, 9 masters – silver medals, 14 students received certificates¹⁶.

At another party held on October 14, 2002, 17 master's degree students, 16 master's degree graduates, 4 postgraduate students, 2 young inventors, 5 graduates of postgraduate courses were awarded silver medals¹⁷ while the outstanding graduates received the "David Anahaght" award. The numerical increase in the progress of the participating students was even more obvious this time.

¹⁵ Այլը, 17.08.2000:

¹⁶ Այլը, 22.06.2000:

¹⁷ Այլը, 15.10.2002:

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The above-mentioned measure of potential evaluation is in fact a demonstration of the intellectual capacity of the community.

In the academic year of 2002–2003, 520 pupils were admitted to Iranian universities, of which 322 for bachelor's degree and 189 for master's degree. There were also 9 doctorate students. Most of them entered the Islamic Azad University. The achievements of the community are indeed obvious, particularly the admission to the doctoral department, prevailing medical specialties (8 out of 9)¹⁸.

Thus, according to the published data, if in 2001, the number of Armenians admitted to Iranian universities was 323, in 2002 this number increased to 520. Interestingly enough, this index, with a small deviation, was maintained in 2003. The list for the academic year of 2003–2004 shows that only 507 Armenians were admitted to the Islamic Azad University, of which 175 for a bachelor's degree education, 225 for a master's degree, 51 for a part-time education bachelor's degree, 1 for a doctor's degree, etc¹⁹.

As a result of passing the entrance exams of 2003, the professional distribution had the following picture: foreign language – 56, Armenian language and literature – 53, Persian language and literature – 3, engineering and computer sciences – 56, physics and mathematics – 31, chemistry and experimental sciences – 27, economics, accounting, administration – 27, statistics – 11, state administration – 2, archeology – 3, geography – 2, music, law, doctorate in pharmacy – 1 for each specialty, etc.

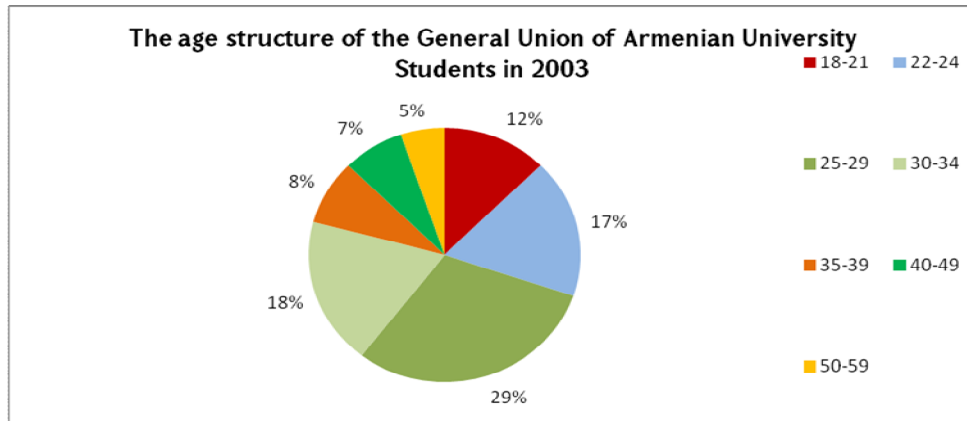
It should be noted that the leading position in the doctoral program is occupied by the specialty of medicine, which is a good indicator of postgraduate education.

The information provided on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the General Union of Armenian University Students is a source about the general educational level of the community in the same year. It becomes clear that in 2003 the union had 1024 graduate students, of which 568 was female (55%) and 456 was male (45%)²⁰. In fact, the difference between men and women was 10%.

¹⁸ Ալիք, 20.10.2002, 06.11.2002:

¹⁹ Ալիք, 02, 03, 04 և 20.11.2003:

²⁰ **Դոկտոր Օննիկ Սահակեան**, Միութեան անդամակցման կազմը եւ մասնագիտական դասակարգումը, համառոտ քննարկում, Ալիք, 30.11.2003:

Figure 1:

The members of the Union were divided into 3 groups according to the code data. a. *Elders*: persons over 30 years of age, 417 in number, b. *Students* – 414, c. *Graduates* – 193. Thus, the number of student-members of the Union was 40%, and the majority of the rest were graduates and elders. At the same time, graduates made up 19%, and elders – 41%. In fact, some of the graduates with higher education emigrated to other countries to work for high pay.

It is interesting that according to the criteria of the three-level educational system, the members of the Union had the following classification: Bachelor's degree – 891 people or 87%, master's degree – 51 people or 5%, doctorate or postgraduate degree – 54 people or 5%, Armenian studies – 28 people or 3%. In fact, most had a bachelor's degree.

This Union, based in Tehran back in 1943, organizes its activities according to professional departments through sports, literature, architecture, medicine, art, history of Armenia²¹. Let us present the composition of the Union according to the professional classification of Iranian universities.

²¹ Փահլավյան 2003, 256:

Table 1:

The composition of the General Union of Armenian University Students Union according to the professional classification of Iranian universities in 2003		
N	Profession	Number
1.	Architecture and adjacent branches	57
2.	Engineering and adjacent branches	331
3.	Chemistry, Physics and adjacent branches	118
4.	Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and adjacent branches	96
5.	Linguistics	215
6.	Accounting and administration	118
7.	Economics and insurance	38
8.	Humanities	36
9.	Philosophy	1
10.	Political science	1
11.	Jurisprudence	9
12.	Archeology	1
13.	Historiography	2
14.	Geography	1

It should be noted that the mentioned 14 scientific branches have 132 subdivisions, which reflect the professional diversity of the Union members.

The table presented above shows clearly that the community has a large number of people in the spheres of engineering, linguistics, as well as chemistry, physics and related specialties. Conventionally speaking, they occupy the first three positions of the most popular professions in the Armenian community.

At the same time it should be mentioned that in the middle of the 2000s, 5% of the population in Iran was illiterate²², which is equivalent to several million people. However, the Armenian community of Iran as a religious minority, is in a favorable position. Meanwhile, other peoples living in Iran, more than ten times larger in number, are, on average, definitely behind the Armenians in terms of higher education.

Indeed, community organizations focus on some support programs for young people with higher education. A case in point should be considered the initiative

²² Թաղևոսյան 2005, 56:

of the Diocesan Council in 2002, which, under the direction of the Armenian Church-School Trustee of Ghazvin, provided a group of Tehran-Armenian students with temporary rooms as a student dormitory at the local Armenian “Raffi” school²³.

Within the framework of the issue, it is important to note that in the academic year of 2004-2005, the RA government approved 75 places for the Diaspora to study in the RA universities by state order. Among them 5 were meant for postgraduate studies and 70 – for university education.²⁴ Meanwhile, 89 entrants from Iran alone have expressed a desire to study in the Armenian universities. The situation was more or less the same in 2004²⁵. The involvement of Iranian-Armenian applicants at the expense of the RA budget, the provision of additional places for them can be beneficial not only for those young people, but also for the Republic of Armenia, for in that way the country will accept young and capable minds. As for the Iranian-Armenian youth, instead of emigrating to other countries, they will be repatriated to Armenia while receiving higher education.

Conclusion

The restriction of religious minorities, including the Armenians, in the Iranian state system has had some impact on the choice of professions in universities. In addition, the application of sophisticated educational standards for university admissions poses some difficulties for the Armenian community, which is considered a religious minority.

The demand for engineering professions in Iran has led to an increase in the number of people in the community in the professional sphere of engineering.

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²³ Ալիք, 21.12.2002:

²⁴ Ալիք, 12.07.2004:

²⁵ Ալիք, 22.09.2004:

Թադևոսյան Ռ., 2005, Իրան, Երևան, Հեղինակային հրատ., 64 էջ:

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ԲԱՐՁՐԱԳՈՒՅՆ ԿՐԹՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԸ ԻՐԱՆԱՀԱՅ ՀԱՄԱՅՆՔՈՒՄ (2000–2004 ԹԹ.)

ՄԿՐՏՉՅԱՆ Կ.

Ամփոփում

Քանալի բառեր՝ Իրանի հայ համայնք, բարձրագույն կրթություն, ուսանողներ, իրանական բուհեր, ընդունելություն, մասնագիտություն, Իսլամական Ազատ համալսարան:

Իրանի հայ համայնքի կրթական մակարդակը կարելի է քննարկել իրանական կրթական համակարգի ու դրա առանձնահատկությունների համատեքստում: Իրանում կրոնական փոքրամասնությունների ներկայացուցիչներին, այդ թվում՝ հայերին աշխատանքի ընդունելու սահմանափակումը որոշակիորեն ազդում է նաև բուհերում մասնագիտական նախընտրության ձևավորման վրա:

Համալսարան ընդունվելու համար քննություններ հանձնելը և դրանց չափորոշիչների, ինչպես նաև այլ պահանջների խստագույնս կիրառումը մրցութային լուրջ խնդիրներ է ստեղծում հայ կրոնական փոքրամասնություն համայնքի համար: 2000 թ. դրությամբ իրանահայ միջնակարգ դպրոցների շրջանավարտները կազմել են 2378 հոգի, իրանական բուհեր է ընդունվել նրանց մինչև 15 %-ը: Իրանում ճարտարագիտական մասնագիտությունների պահանջարկի հետևանքով համայնքում ևս մեծացել է այդ մասնագիտություններով դիմորդների թիվը: Այստեղ մեծ թիվ է կազմել նաև լեզվագիտության, քիմիայի, ֆիզիկայի և հարակից մասնագիտությունների պահանջարկը:

Հենց դրանք էլ զբաղեցրել են հայ համայնքում առավել տարածված մասնագիտությունների ցանկի առաջին հորիզոնականները:

ВОПРОС ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ИРАНО-АРМЯНСКОЙ ОБЩИНЕ (2000–2004 гг.)

МКРТЧЯН К.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: армянская община Ирана, высшее образование, студенты, иранские высшие учебные заведения, прием, профессия, Исламский Азат университет.

Уровень образования в армянской общине Ирана следует рассматривать в контексте иранской образовательной системы и ее особенностей. Ограничения в отношении религиозных меньшинств, в том числе армян, в иранской государственной системе в определенной степени оказывают влияние на выбор профессии.

Соблюдение стандартов при вступительных экзаменах в иранские вузы, а также других требований создает серьезные проблемы для армянской общины, которая считается религиозным меньшинством. К примеру, в 2000 г. число выпускников ирано-армянских средних школ составило 2378 чел., и всего 15 % от общего числа выпускников поступило в иранские вузы. В силу востребованности инженеров в армянской общине возросло число желающих получить образование по этой специальности. В иранской армянской общине не менее востребованы специалисты в области лингвистики, химии, физики и смежных профессий. Именно перечисленные профессии являются наиболее популярными в армянской общине Ирана.