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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN BUKHARA DURING THE REIGN OF AMIR SAID ALIMKHAN

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Abstract. This article discusses the role of the Bukhara Emirate in Central Asia, its system of state governance, social and cultural conditions, the main occupations of the population, the tax system, cultural development, the education system, the accession of Amir Said Alimkhan to the throne, the reforms he implemented, and their significance.

Keywords. Amir, Said Alimkhan, Amlak, mulki khos, mulki waqf, khiraj, ushr, mulki khurri kholis, daru bast, animal husbandry, karakul sheep breeding, silk, wool, cotton, carpet, mosque, madrasa, decree, reform, manifesto, Russia, people's revolution, school.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Bukhara Emirate - one of the largest states in Central Asia - was a semi-colony of the Russian Empire, dependent in foreign affairs yet relatively independent in internal matters. However, governance within the emirate had been under strict supervision of the Russian Empire's Political Agency in Bukhara since 1885. According to Amir Said Alimkhan's own writings, the territory belonging to the Bukhara state at that time covered 225,000 square kilometers, roughly equal to the area of Italy. He also wrote that the population of Bukhara consisted of 3 million people, mainly Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Jews, and Arabs, with Uzbeks numbering over 2 million. This shows that Bukhara was a multi-ethnic state, home to representatives of all Central Asian peoples.

The country was economically underdeveloped, and the main occupation of the population was farming, closely tied to artificial irrigation. On the eve of 1910, the total area of cultivated land in the emirate was 2,250,000 desyatins, and 90% of the 3 million population consisted of peasants. For many centuries, land ownership in the emirate had existed in the forms of amlak (state lands), mulki khos or mulki kholis (private lands), and mulki waqf (lands belonging to mosques, madrasas, and khanaqas).

Although properties were divided into state, private, and waqf categories, the tax system distinguished between kharaj lands (33%), ushr lands (10%), and waqf variants of each. On

state lands, tenant farmers worked and paid taxes in kind or partially in cash on their harvests. Income from waqf lands served as the main source of funding for the education system.

Additionally, lands exempt from all taxes, payments, and public duties were called mulki khurri kholis or daru bast (meaning their doors were closed to tax collectors). A strict class hierarchy was in place: the emir, his officials, and nobles were the upper class with broad privileges. Religious figures had strong influence over state affairs, and law and order were administered according to Islamic law. After the clergy, wealthy merchants held considerable influence in society, with economically powerful traders making up a significant share.

The main occupations of the urban population were trade and craftsmanship, while the rural population's primary livelihood was tied to agricultural farming. Alongside irrigated farming, dryland farming was also practiced in mountainous and foothill areas. Horticulture, viticulture, and vegetable growing declined noticeably during the semi-colonial years, as cotton farming received special attention under Russian imperial rule, with large portions of land allocated to growing cotton.

The profit from cotton surpassed the income from all other products, and the emirate was increasingly becoming a raw material base for Russia. From 1893 to 1917, the area of cotton-growing land in Bukhara reached 300,000 tanobs, generating revenue of 25 million gold rubles. Alongside cotton, animal husbandry - especially karakul sheep breeding - and the production of silk and wool goods grew year by year. While 30,000 - 40,000 karakul pelts were exported from the Bukhara Emirate to Russia in the early colonial years, by 1914 this figure had risen to 1,800,000 pieces. Some 80% of cotton and karakul pelts were exported to Russia.

In the 20th century, Bukhara - the capital of the emirate - was the cultural and religious center of Central Asia, renowned by the names Bog'chai Olam, Buxoroi Sharif, and Sacred Bukhara. The city had more than 400 madrasas, mosques, and khanaqas. The Labi Khovuz Devonbegi Mosque and the Ali Bolo Khovuz Mosque were the most famous, each hosting more than 4,000 Muslims during Friday prayers. In 1910, a council of Islamic scholars consisting of 19 khazrats and mawlanas formed the religious advisory body of Amir Said Alimkhan. In the madrasas of the capital, 800 teachers gave religious and secular instruction to 34,000 students.

Sharia law was in force throughout the emirate, and Bukhara was recognized worldwide as a strong fortress of Islam. However, Said Alimkhan was influenced not so much by his secular trusted advisors as by deeply conservative Islamic spiritual advisors and counselors.

On December 30, 1910, Amir Alimkhan ascended to the throne. At the beginning of his reign, he issued orders stating that he would not accept gifts, that ministers and other officials were forbidden from taking bribes, and that tax collectors and officials were prohibited from using collected taxes for personal gain. However, as time passed, the situation changed, and

those who sought to introduce new laws were sent to Moscow and Kazan. Said Alimkhan continued to govern in the traditional manner.

After ascending to the throne, Amir Said Alimkhan also undertook a series of reforms. He initially issued a decree on state administration and tax collection. The decree consisted of 4 clauses, which Abdurauf Fitrat describes in his work "The Reign of Amir Alimkhan" as follows:

1. Banning gifts and tribute to the palace;
2. Establishing a road tax (farsakh/tosh money);
3. Reducing land tax by one-tenth;
4. Increasing the monthly salaries of military personnel⁶.

In addition, in March 1911, Amir Alimkhan issued a decree "On the Abolition of Excessively Lavish Weddings." Issue No. 92 of the *Turkestanskije Vedomosti* newspaper, dated April 28, 1911, stated: "Those who serve food other than pilaf at weddings shall be punished with 75 lashes. Buzkashi (goat-grabbing) and horse racing events held at circumcision and wedding ceremonies are hereby abolished. Those who do not comply shall be sentenced to death. Furthermore, the custom of giving robes to wedding guests in addition to a feast is hereby banned. The amount of bride price (mahr), which is burdensome for ordinary people, shall be reduced."⁷

That same year, Amir Alimkhan also undertook educational reform. Issue No. 12 of the *Tarjimon* newspaper, dated March 18, 1911, cited an excerpt from the emir's decree: "Students at madrasas shall not be taught various Hashiya commentaries. Tafsir and hadith shall be taught as official subjects. Schools shall be built in various parts of the country using funds collected from waqfs, and teachers shall be appointed to them. A school teacher must be a scholar, with good handwriting and a pleasant recitation voice, and shall be paid an annual salary of 120 tangas from the state treasury in addition to the school's waqf income. No fees shall be charged to children for education. A supervisor shall be appointed to the schools and shall inspect each school monthly and report to the emir."

After coming to power, Amir Said Alimkhan also issued a special decree restricting lavish ceremonies, including holidays. Under this decree, the Nowruz holiday was to be celebrated for one day at the Registan square in Bukhara city. In 1912, the newspapers *Buxoroyi Sharif* and its supplement *Turon* began to be published under the patronage of Mirzo Muhiddin Abduqodirov and Mirzo Sirojiddin Hakim.

Amir Alimkhan carried out a number of cultural construction projects during his reign, building madrasas, mosques, and bridges. As he himself wrote: Below the Bukhara minaret, I

6 Абдурауф Фитрат. Амир Олимхоннинг ҳукмронлик даври. – Т.: Минҳож, 1992. Б.44.

7 Амир Саййид Олимхон. Бухоро халқининг ҳасрати тарихи. – Т.: Фан, 1991. Б.32.

built a madrasa - a Darul - Ulum - in my own name; I appointed teachers to give instruction in various sciences. The living expenses, salaries, and clothing of the students residing at the madrasa were also provided by me, and I appointed a supervisor; their food, salaries, and clothing were delivered at set times.⁸

He also wrote: "After ascending the throne, I issued a decree exempting the country from one year's kharaj payment. By acting in this way, I brought great joy to the poor people, and their spirits were lifted greatly. A year later, I strived to establish a system of compassion and care for the needy, and began to bring order and prosperity to the Bukhara state. I made every effort to undertake great works, and began constructing madrasas and houses of worship. I made considerable effort in teaching all branches of knowledge."

"Near the Ark of the Sacred Bukhara, at a place called Baloi Havz, I built a mosque for worship in my own name. Below the Bukhara minaret, inside the bazaar, I built a Darul-Ulum - a House of Knowledge - in my own name; I appointed teachers to instruct in various sciences. The living expenses, salaries, and clothing of the students at this madrasa were also covered by me, and I appointed a supervisor; their food, salaries, and clothing were delivered at fixed times. I made great efforts to improve the markets and roads, and within three years, the Bukhara state became considerably more prosperous, to which I gave order and beauty. The people of Bukhara and the entire country were pleased with my efforts."⁹

On April 7, 1917, Amir Alimkhan signed a decree on carrying out reforms in the state. The decree included provisions related to regulating the tax system in the emirate, developing industry and trade, placing officials under oversight and assigning them fixed salaries, establishing a special commission to care for the needy, granting freedom to the press, releasing all freethinkers from prison, developing education and science and technology, and teaching secular sciences.

This document was read aloud to nearly 200 officials and religious scholars at the palace. Despite being interpreted by religious leaders as a violation of Sharia law, the decree was adopted. It included clauses on regulating taxation in the emirate, developing industry and trade, placing officials under oversight with fixed salaries, establishing a special commission for the needy, granting press freedom, releasing freethinkers from prison, and promoting education and secular sciences.

Amir Alimkhan held a positive attitude toward changes in the education system coming from the developed countries of Europe and Asia, and did not oppose the teaching of secular sciences. Like his father, Said Alimkhan maintained good relations with several states, including the Russian Empire, the British Empire, the Emirate of Afghanistan, Persia, and the

8 Ражабов Қ. Туркистон тарихида ўтган 55 буюк сиймо. – Т.: Фан, 2022. Б 78.

9 Ахмеджанов Г.А. Российская империя в Центральной Азии. –Т.: Фан, 1995. С 84.

Ottoman Empire. Relations with the neighboring Khorezm state (Khiva Khanate) and Turkmen tribes to the southwest of the Bukhara Emirate were cool.

Following the February Revolution and the October coup in Russia in 1917, although the independence of the Bukhara Emirate was recognized by both the Provisional Government and Soviet authorities, its territory and borders were under the control of Soviet Russia, and Bukhara was cut off from the outside world. Between August 29 and September 2, 1920, as a result of aerial and ground assaults by Soviet forces, an anti-monarchist "people's revolution" was carried out in Bukhara. Having barely escaped with his life, the emir retreated to Eastern Bukhara (present-day Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan) with a small number of officials and nobles. His resistance movement against the Bolsheviks in Eastern Bukhara continued until spring 1921, after which he crossed into Afghanistan in March of that year.

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