



The Bukhara of Sadri Aini

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In ancient times, the southern flank of the present-day republics of Central Asia was inhabited by Indo-European peoples. Primarily Iranian, they occupied not only the cities of Samarkand and Panjkent but also the regions to the east as far as Turfan and Loulan (Grousset, 1970). In subsequent centuries, Arab, Turkish, and Mongol invaders reshaped the political, social, and economic dynamics of the region. The Arab invasion, for instance, supplanted both the Zoroastrian faith and the Middle Persian Pahlavi language, making the Iranian Tajiks the oldest Muslim community of the region.

The battle of Talas (AD 751) was a turning point in Central Asian history. In the course of that battle, the forces of Islam routed the army of the Emperor of China and established Islamic rule firmly in the region (Kwanten, 1979). Furthermore, by involving the Turks in the war, the Muslims' victory enlarged and diversified the umma (cf., Kedourie, 1992, p. 2). Tenth century Central Asia was the world of the Muslim Arabs and Persians whose cooperation had created a new center of Islamic culture in the East. Distinguished as "the focus of splendor, the meeting place of the most unique intellects of the Age, the Horizon of the literary stars of the world, and the Fair of the greatest scholars of the Period" (Clinton 1972, 4), Saman Khuda's Bukhara rivaled Baghdad in pomp as well as in trade and economic well-being.

Before the fall of the Samanids, the umma consisted of settled Persians marshaled into war by Arab commanders. After the Samanids, Turkish sultans provided regional security and promoted trade and culture. Iranian and Arab Muslims, now collectively called Tazik (i.e., Arab), found themselves increasingly subservient to the Turks. Even those positions were further undermined when successive invasions by the Kara-Khitay, Mongol, and Timurids brought more nomads into the region. Distinguishing themselves as the descendants of Chingiz Khan, the newcomers belittled the settled populations, including the sedentary Turks, by referring to them as Sarts (Barthold 1956, 63; Wheeler 1964, 8).

The "Great Game" introduced a different division, especially when as a result of the 1873 treaty between Britain and Russia the homeland of the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens was partitioned and their ethnic, economic, and cultural unity was shattered (Bradsher 1983, pp. 9-13). That territorial division, however, was the precursor to further losses as the latent forces of modernization, i.e., westernization, Russification, and Sovietization vied for the cultural soul and economic resources of Turkistan.

The concentric waves of Western technological progress, the West's newly adopted lifestyle, and the indigenous peoples' call for democratic institutions impacted the Muslim East at different times. For instance, when Egypt and the Ottoman Empire had begun their reform programs at the beginning of the 1800s, Iran was still passing the last stages of its medieval existence. Similarly, fifty years after the onset of Ottoman reforms, when Iranian intellectuals had founded their first western-style school and had initiated other reforms, Afghanistan and Central Asia were still suffering the tyranny of their ruthless kings and Emirs. Modernization, however, was not a simple process. It entailed a reexamination of traditional values and reorganization of age-old priorities--factors that concerned the 'Ulemas and despots of all Muslim countries. Furthermore, it took some twenty to thirty years before modernization's manipulative arms, westernization and sovietization, affected the dynamics of Muslim societies visibly. When that happened, supportive and opposition groups were formed, populations were polarized, and the social and political atmosphere of the countries affected became increasingly tense. Islam, the culture most affected by the ideologies espoused by the new changes, assumed a defensive posture, hoping to weather the storm.

This paper is part of a project entitled "The impact of Westernization and Sovietization on Islam in Westasia." The paper examines the dynamics of cultural change in Bukhara between 1890 and 1920 as opposition to Manghit rule mounts and threatens the future of the Emirate. The cultural values and events are viewed through the eyes of Sadriddin Aini as he recalled them at a later date, in the 1940s.

Born in 1878 in a village north of Bukhara, Aini grew up in a middle-class family of artisans. He was orphaned at an early age but, aided by a Bukhara well-wisher, completed his education at the Mir Arab madrasah. In the 1940s, he published his *Reminiscences*, a major part of which deals with the Bukhara of Emirs Abdalahad (1885-1910) and Alim Khan (1910-1920). Known as the father of Tajik and Uzbek literatures, Aini died in 1954.

Interested in education, especially for the young, Aini investigates the educational system of Bukhara, pointing out its inadequacies. After nineteen years of study, Aini explains, the graduates of the Bukhara madrasahs were as poorly informed about the world as were their illiterate countrymen. This was the case because, according to Aini, the curriculum began with three years of intensive Arabic language, taught with the aid of Tajiki, followed by five years of Arabic syntax and logic taught in Arabic, and eleven years of *kalom* (theology). Subjects like mathematics were offered as electives. Furthermore, lessons were not graded and learning was through rote memorization. Often instruction of the advanced levels of Arabic syntax preceded the instruction of Arabic morphology and phrase structure. Calligraphy and improvisation in poetry accrued the most merit. The academic year was six months in duration so that students could leave Bukhara to aid their parents in the fields. The school week was four days long, three days if the declining health of the aged mullahs warranted. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were official days off. And although the schools were under the auspices of the *awqaf* (Aini, 160), education was not free. Each student had to either buy or rent his living quarters from merchants who had subsidized the badly needed repairs for the schools.

Not all the youths of Bukhara could afford the luxury of attending schools and becoming mullahs and administrators. The majority joined the labor pool and became shopkeepers, house attendants, carters, water carriers, itinerant workers, and carpenters. There were two types of laborers in Bukhara: the ozod (free) and the bonak (debtor). The ozod chose their place of work; if conditions were not satisfactory, they could seek employment elsewhere. The bonak, however, because they had received advances on their pay, could not leave their place of first employment before their debts were fully paid. A good portion of the bonak's wages, however, went to offset the interest on the initial loan; consequently, the bonak found himself being increasingly "bought" by the shop owner. In fact, bonak workers were traded like cattle, with each transaction adding to the bonak's debt to the new owner.

Atrocious working conditions in the sweatshops and the pressures that the bobos (foremen) brought to bear on the bonak usually drove the helpless workers to insanity--the bonaks were referred to as "insane kids." Those who could not withstand the pressure fled the city. But unfortunately, potential employers frowned on hiring bonaks whose bobos would hunt them down and take them away. Some new employers turned the truant bonak over to the bobo for a commission. This commission and the bobo's expenses were also added to the worker's total debt.

Professions in Bukhara were attached to guilds and all ozod workers were members of guilds. Each guild had a charter, a set of guidelines, and a patron saint. The patron saint of the water carriers, for instance, was 'Abbas who, in Karbala, had brought water to the party of al-Hussein and the patron saint of the horse groomers was Qanbar, who had served as a groom to Imam Ali's horse. The guilds did not charge a membership fee. In the Bukhara of the 1890s, the shoemakers, the water carriers, the carters and horse groomers, and the weavers had their own guilds. The risolehs (rule books) for the guilds were written by the clergy who also bonded the workers. Transgression of the rules resulted in a fine. The money from the fines went into a fund used at the discretion of the owners and the clergy. Promotion within the guild involved a ceremony and a party. The party was thrown by the eligible candidate. After the party, the candidate's peers and the clergy sanctioned the promotion by conferring on the worker the tools of his profession--a pair of scissors, a saw, or whatever. The water carriers' guild and the guild for the horse groomers and carters were the most democratic. The entire membership participated in the election of their bobos. The other guilds chose their bobos by a consensus of the ostoho-i kalon (supervisors), ostoho (managers), and retailers. The position of the bobo was of great importance to the owners. The bobo settled all disputes among guild members, supervised the workers' conduct, and made sure that they adhered to the regulations, especially with regard to hygiene and ethical deference. Furthermore, he hunted down truant workers and returned them to the shop.

Another major contributor to the guilds, and to the society at large, was the alufta who, in addition to being an exemplary worker, dispensed justice and safeguarded the honor of the community. Conflicts among aluftas were settled in a fight which was conducted according to the unwritten rules of Central Asian chivalry. The highest level an alufta reached was that of the mard-i mardon (man of men). The mard-i mardon wore a heel-

less shoe with a pointed front. The shoe was made of yellowish leather. He wore a small turban loosely tied so that the end of it hung like a tail. The front of the mard-i mardon's shirt was solid and around his waist he wore a simple, inexpensive kerchief accentuated with a simple knife in a sheath. The rank below the mard-i mardon was the taiyyor. He wore high-heeled shoes and carried a knife about a half arshin¹ in length. The taiyyor wore his shirt with the front open and tied his turban tightly into an intricate, basket-like pattern. He also allowed a generous portion of the end to form a long tail. The lowest rank was that of the nim-taiyyor (lit., half-taiyyor or apprentice). He, too, wore high-heeled shoes, but tied his turban simple (i.e., without weaving it into form), with a short tail left loose. He tied a rupakche (kerchief) around his waist and wore a medium-sized knife. The front of nim-taiyyor's shirt was solid.

The alufta's oath was "sattor." If an alufta promised to carry out a task by invoking sattor, he would carry it out at all costs. aluftas who reneged on their word were ostracized as nomards (cowards). In the event of the death of the mard-i mardon, or his failure to carry out his duties, one of the taiyyors would fill the vacancy. The candidate had to be unique in valor and of good repute.

The fights among the aluftas were regulated. If a taiyyor challenged a mard-i mardon and won, he would become the new mard-i mardon. If he lost, he would be forced out of the circle of the aluftas. If two equally ranked taiyyors fought, the one who lost would remain a taiyyor, provided he would give in and accept the superiority of his opponent. If he did not acknowledge his shortcoming, he would be forced out of the group.

Bukhara under Emir Abdalahad was a hotbed of discontent. A major cause of the unhappiness was the court itself which, through its many tentacles--ministries, administrative offices, land grants, businesses, and the mosque--exploited the uneducated workers and peasants. The Emir's high officials employed the youth of Bukhara as conscripts without pay and every year a quota of young boys and girls was filled to refurbish the Emir's harem and provide him with presents that he could bestow on his officials as royal gifts.

In addition to the ozod youths, the bonak, the alufta, and the students of the Bukharan madrasahs, there were the sons of the Emir's officials and of the mullahs. Enjoying the greatest degree of freedom, these boys spent most of their time in the Samovarkhona (tea houses). Rather than for tea, however, the sons of the bais and qozis gathered in the Samovarkhona to smoke hashish, gamble, and drink alcoholic beverages. The remote location of the Samvorvarkhona shielded them from their strict fathers and their spies (Aini, 576). Another gathering place for the youth of Bukhara was the Ghaybatkhona (backbiters' den). This small school played a different but major role in the Bukharan society of the time. Its members were mostly self-made youths who, against all odds, had succeeded in joining the intellectual circle of Bukhara. Here, they engaged in playing intellectually stimulating games like hahbozi² and baytbarak.³ Some cultivated their

¹ An arshin is 0.71 meter in length.

² Game in which the conversants were not allowed to use the spoken form "hah" in responding orally to a statement. Only "ori" and "bali" were permitted. (Aini, p. 567).

talents in music, dance, and travel while others enjoyed heated discussions about the politics of social reform. The politically-oriented wing of the group held secret meetings and discussed the ramifications of such political issues as Russia's overlordship of Bukhara; the polarization that had pitted the Emir's government against the influential Muslim clergy; the Emir's disregard for the Shari'a; and the State's inability to enforce its laws on Russians, even on Russian sympathizers (Aini p. 579).

The butt of the jokes at the Ghaybatkhona was the mirshab (night watchman) who, as the protégé of the ghushbegi (prime minister), was held responsible for the promotion of crime. On the one hand the mirshab's sphere of corruption touched the Emir, the chief judge, the provincial governors and, on the other, the rascals, murderers, and the thieves of Bukhara. The mirshab had allegedly gathered enough wealth to send gifts to all those above him, including the Emir, and still own many of the houses and businesses in the Emirate. Satires about the mirshab's inadequacies circulated verbally. None of the authors, however, dared write their satires in their own handwriting.

The Ghaibatkhona was the voice of the intellectuals of Bukhara who, since the early 1890's had assembled in Sharifjan Makhdum's home for the three-day weekends. There they recited their own poetry, criticized the works of their contemporaries, participated in baytbarak, and improvised poetry in response to challenges from colleagues. The host, Sharifjan Makhdum, was the son of the Qozi Kalon (chief judge) of Bukhara. At the age of 27, in 1891, he was an exemplary young man. Unlike the sons of the clergy who shunned calligraphy, literacy, and poetry, Sharifjan had made his house the center of Bukharan culture. Poets, critics, men of wit, even comedians and musicians regularly frequented his gatherings.

Sharifjan's guests included the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the sane, and the insane. This latter factor was important because some guests, like Abdul Majid Zufunun, who in reality was skilled in literature and the sciences, especially in traditional medicine, and Yahyo Khoja, who was a satirist, feigned madness in order to acquire license to poke fun at the world but, more importantly, to criticize the actions of the Emir without being chastised. Other guests did not go that far. They used satire and criticism to stimulate political thinking. Skilled in the use of pun, Mullah Nazrullah Sahhaf Lutfi intimidated not only the government and the clergy, but Makhdum's guests as well. Some of the older guests served as resource persons for the group. The sixty-year old Homid Beg Homid, who had participated in Amir Muzzafar's war with the Russians, recalled the events of that war. His recollections constitute the frame for Ahmad Makhdum Danish's "history" of the Bukhara Emirate. Another veteran who had written about that war was Mirzo Azim Somi Bustoni. His chronicles, however, had brought about his dismissal from the court.

A striking figure who frequented both the intellectuals' gatherings and the Ghaibatkhona was forty-five year old Mullah Amon. He took the concerns of the intellectuals to the Ghaibatkhona, stimulated debate, and advocated the type of changes that the intellectuals

³ A game involving recitation of poetry. Each distich of the opponent's response had to begin with the rhyming letter of the contender's bayt. (Aini, pp. 153-155).

did not discuss openly. "Rather than spending your time in playing useless games and in criticizing the government and the mullahs," he would say to the Ghaybatkhana youth, "try to set up schools to educate our children, set up a printing press. Organize your forces and communicate your thoughts to the public. What is the use of the few of you reading each others' verses?"

While before 1905 the reformist movement in Bukhara was passive and disparate, after 1905 it became active and focused. A number of factors, including the prevalence of uncensored news from Russia, the enthusiasm of people like Mullah Amon, and the transitional nature of Emir Abulohad's rule were factors pointing to a need for reform. Then in 1910, the new Emir, Alim Khan, introduced some reforms which, among other things, affected education, administration, and the treasury. He also restrained the excesses of the executive branch of his government. Land reform, the most important item on the list of the jadidists, however, was not considered.

In the past, Aini had extended his assistance to the Tatars of Bukhara whose schools instructed all children--Uzbek, Tajik, and Tatar--in the Tatar language. He had offered his services as an interpreter and had prepared textbooks for the instruction of Tajiki (1907-09). Now he became more active, especially since he participated in both Sharifjan Makhdum's sessions and mingled with the political wing of the Ghaibatkhona.

Concerned by the use of the new methodology adopted by the school, the clergy threatened to kill the teachers. The Emir, fearful of facing a general uprising instigated by the clergy, aborted his reforms and closed the school. Desperate, Aini took his case to the 'Alim of Bukhara and pleaded that the school should be reopened. The 'Alim advised self preservation. "You are a learned man yourself," he said to Aini. "Is that not enough? Become a qadi or a director yourself. Forget about other peoples' children!"

The restrictions imposed changed the school's mode of operation. Classes were moved to underground shelters and educational activities became clandestine. Furthermore, great efforts were made to keep undesired elements, especially the Emir's spies, out of the system. By 1914, the number of schools had risen to six. In addition, some adult education classes had been added. But the Emir's spies finally discovered the shelters and the classes. In 1915, about 50 individuals were incarcerated. Aini, having been tipped off about the arrest by his "spies" at the Qozi Kalon's office, was not among them. He was summoned and questioned at a later time and was warned against reading newspapers, engaging in political discussions, and participating in provocative meetings.

From 1915 to 1917, Aini worked in a cotton processing factory in Qizil Tuybe, away from the political scene. He was briefed about the developments in Bukhara once a week. Living among the peasants, especially during the 1916 uprising when the whole of Turkistan rose against the Tsar, provided Aini with knowledge that was not available to the rest of the jadidists. Aini noted that while Bukhara was torn between the reformists and the government, and while the upper echelon supported the Emir and the Tsar, the countryside was totally committed to the reformists' aspirations for a progressive Bukhara.

Even the defeat of the uprising did not affect the villagers' support for the reformist to whom they extended hospitality and protection.

Knowledgeable about the power of the villagers and fearing that energetic young men like Aini might actively promote jadidism in the countryside, the Emir took certain steps to forestall the reformists' activities. First, he recalled the reform-minded youths from the countryside to Bukhara and installed them in high, religious posts in the city. Aini, for instance, was appointed to the prestigious Khiyaban Madrasah, even though he lacked the years of service required and the approval of the aksakals to teach there. Then he mobilized his sympathizers--anti-reformist mullahs, especially--and sent them to the countryside to alert the villagers to the evil spread by the jadidists and to the danger that threatened their beliefs, homes, and fields. By the time of the Russian Revolution, therefore, the villagers' attitude towards reform had been totally changed.

The news of the events that had started in Petrograd in February 23-24 (old calendar) displaced the rumors that the Tsar had "voluntarily abdicated." Accompanying the hard facts was also a group of youths who had returned from Turkey and who had first hand knowledge of the jadidist ideas. Emboldened by these changes, the Bukharan jadidists went public and called for educational reform, land reform, and an overhaul of the Emir's administration. And to force the Emir's hand, they dispatched letters to St Petersburg and to the governor of Turkistan persuading them to convince the Emir of the importance of their suggested reforms.

Aini viewed reform not as a series of mandates by autocrats and well-wishers, but as a grass-roots movement that encompassed all strata of society. He opposed public advocacy of reform before the countryside was turned around and before the power of the mullahs had been diminished. He was overruled by the majority. His advocacy was based on his recent trips to the countryside where he had not met any of the peasants with whom he had conversed before. His discussions, however, alerted him to the role that the mullahs had played in the reversal of the villagers' attitude towards reforms, now identified with kufr (irreligion).

Secure in his position, and in order to identify and destroy the reformists once and for all, the Emir announced a series of reforms, which included education and administrative reform, beginning with the Emir's own court; allocation of a budget for government employees, regulation of the zakat and other royal land taxes. Other reforms announced were the abolition of an'am, ihsan, and pishkash⁴; installation of a printing press in Bukhara; establishment of a Consultative Committee; and employment of a treasurer to balance the State's books. to thank the Emir, the majority decided to throw a party. Once again Aini cautioned against exposing the members to danger. But, in response to those observations and Aini's pleas that the Emir has given only verbal assurances to reforms couched in the Islamic Shari'a, the reformists said, "Once the Emir is forced to accept the reforms, he will not be able to back out. As for peasants, what can they lose but their oppressive masters!"

⁴ Various types of gifts presented at the court to facilitate the progress of one's affairs through the bureaucracy.

As it turned out, the Emir had capitalized on the clergy's vehement opposition to the reforms and, by couching every article in the Shari'a, had placed himself in the clear. Once the reformists took to the streets to celebrate their victory, they were confronted by a sea of club-wielding mullahs in white turbans. Before long, both the majority and the minority, including Aini, who had refused to participate in the celebration, were assembled in the Emir's prison. Aini survived the torture, but his brother was not as lucky. He died while being tortured.

Aini's connection with the Bukhara reformists and with this phase of the jadidists movement ended here. Rescued from prison, he was sent to Samarqand where, in spite of a hostile clergy, he lived until the fall of the Emirate. Thereafter, too, he was not active in the affairs of Bukhara. His eyewitness account, however, illustrates that societies, like people, must grow to change. People must react to oppression and injustice, but before that they must recognize the ruses of the tyrants who manipulate them. Aini's Bukhara had not developed to the level where it could save one of its own from the clutches of a barbarous Emir and a group of greedy mullahs. Rather than doing him justice, a carter who had stood up for his right, was stoned to death by his own fellow citizens and in the very streets in which he had grown up.

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