

TRAVELING TO MODERNITY: PERCEPTION OF MODERNITY OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIMS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract. *Hajj pilgrimage has been always important part of the Islamic world in terms of interrelations and knowledge sharing among various cultures. Nineteenth century brought tremendous changes to the Middle East and Asia including political integration of empires and reformation movements. Central Asian Muslims experienced the technological and economic advances of nineteenth century modernity through their journeys to Mecca. The article analyses the experience of Mulla Ālim, a Turkestanian intellectual who traveled to Mecca in 1909 and became the supporter of change. It argues that, experience of haj pilgrims became important ritual to increase the number of supporters in reformer intelligentsia in Turkestan. It also asserts that admiration of the Turkestanian intellectuals on social and religious in Ottoman Empire impacted their activities towards contributing to reformation of social order by education.*

Key words: *Hajj, modernity, madrasa, education, order.*

Introduction

The historiographical literature on Islam in Central Asia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century is diverse and well-studied. The role of Islam in the life the peoples of the region was unique and traditional values were in harmony with Islamic spirituality. Majority of the population was religious and performed the pillars of Islam as part of the religious norms of the society. Pilgrimage to sacred places was part of the piety and tradition in Central Asia. The most respected pilgrimage was performance of hajj once in a lifetime but not everyone was able to perform it. It required wealth, a great health and relative political stability in the region. However, performance of hajj also rewarding for Central Asian Muslims, particularly during the period of our interest, when Bukhara was seen as ‘isolated’ from the rest of the Islamic world. Hajj pilgrimage gathered hundreds of thousands of Muslims from almost every corner of the Islamic world and created a political platform to share their views.

Central Asian Muslims who traveled to hajj often traveled through Ottoman territories, Iran and India where technological and social advances of the modern life already became a new norm. The paper discusses the impact of hajj pilgrimage to the perceptions of modernity of Central Asian Muslims. The main source of the article is travelogue of Mulla Ālim, editor of “Turkiston Viloyati Gazeti”, written during his travel to Mecca through Ottoman Empire in 1909-10. Based on his observations and opinions about modernity, the article tries to answer questions what was the modernity and where it came from? Can modernity be transformed and who were the main carriers or modernity in Central Asia?

According to the fifth pillar of the Islam, Muslims need to perform a hajj once in their lifetime. Therefore, Muslims of Central Asia who are healthy and financially well-off traveled to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes to perform the pilgrimage. Hajj pilgrimage has been one of the active modes of exchange in the Islamic World throughout

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centuries. There were times when Central Asian hajj pilgrims had difficulties as Shia and Sunni conflict arose during the 16th century stemming from the political struggles between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Iran. However, according to Thomas Welsford, Central Asian pilgrims started making their ways through the territories of Safavid Iran during the early decades of the 17th century[12,p.149].

During the 19th century, routes of Central Asian pilgrims increased by new directions including northern route through Russian Empire. Especially after expansion of the Russian Empire towards Central Asia, Tatars and Central Asians as Muslim subjects of the Empire, began using imperial infrastructure to make their pilgrimages. The Russian Empire sought to facilitate and coordinate hajj pilgrimage to its Muslim subjects in order to control the routes and subjects' trajectories. According to Eileen Kane, Russian Empire also aimed to integrate the Muslim subjects with outside world and increase their influence[10,p.10-23]. During the second half of the 19th century, Russian Empire expanded towards Central Asian khanates and the traffic of pilgrimages increased. Turkistani Muslims of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand started using new opportunity of the Empire in their holiest pilgrims. It brought new way modernity through integration and involvement of these hajjis with intellectual networks of wider Islamic World.

Main part

On the other hand, political situation in the Ottoman Empire during the first decade of the 20th century determined the approaches of the local level administrators towards pilgrims based on current situations. The impact of imperial disintegration of the Ottoman Empire already started to be felt throughout the Islamic World including Central Asia. The pilgrims who spent substantial time by crossing the territories of the Ottoman Empire were exposed to political and social changes. According to Lale Can, Central Asian pilgrims became non-official subjects of the Ottoman Empire during their time of travel. During this tumultuous time, a complex system of belonging emerged where Central Asian pilgrims could be legally considered a foreigner and a subject of the Ottoman Caliph simultaneously[8,p.5-15]. This blurred line of complexity in subjecthood and belonging also enriched the experience of Central Asian pilgrims who were often became the harbinger of modernity in their home. During the process of journey to the hajj pilgrimage, the pilgrims became aware of the changes and innovations in the socio-economic sphere in Istanbul, Baghdad, Mecca, Medina and Shiraz, and some tried to introduce these reforms in their homeland.

During their pilgrimage, curious Turkistanian pilgrims visited to schools and madrasas to learn about scientific developments in Turkey and Arabia. They mostly interested in curriculum, process of classes, textbooks; freedom and comfort in school buildings and many others which were mostly lacking in the education system in Central Asia. They were especially impressed by the knowledge and manners of the madrasa-school students. Mufti Muhammad Ikram ibn Abdulsalam Bukhari, teacher Mohammed Avaz Khujandi, merchant Mullah Jurabay, teacher Saeed Ahmad Vasili, Mulla Ālim Okhun were among other pilgrims who impressed by the progress of Islamic cities in Istanbul, Baghdad, Mecca, Medina and Shiraz. Upon returning home, they started efforts to open schools and reform madrasas.

According to Sadriddin Ayni(Sadriddin Ayni-was born on 15 April 1878 in the village of Sektare of Gijduvan district, in the emirate of Bukhara. He started attending school at the age of six. Sadriddin came to Bukhara in 1890 and studied at the madrasas of Mir Arab, Badalbek, Ālimkhon. He was a member of the young steam movement. He died on June 15, 1954 in the city of Dushanbe.), the Mufti Muhammad Ikram ibn Abdulsalam Bukhari(Muhammad Ikram Ibn Abdussalom was born in 1847 year in the village of Bagikalon near the city of Bukhara, where he later lived in the poyi Astana cave. After graduating from primary school, 1860-1880 he studied at Badalbek Madrasa from Qazi Abdushukur ibn Abdurasul Bukhari. Muhammad Sharif Chairman Ziya (1865-1932) stated that in his work "Shuaroyi

mutahkhiriyn and fuzaloyi muasiriyn” Ikromcha Domlan wrote a poem under the pseudonym “Akram” and mentioned that “the majority of the students of Bukhara are masters”. At tazkirat ash-shuaro it was said that Domla Ikrom taught at the Mir Arab Madrasa.) and Muhammad Avaz Khujandiy (Muhammad Avaz was a friend of Khujandiy - Muhammad Ikram Ibn Abdussalam and was a teacher in the Bukhara Madrasa. He died in 1907 year.), who were on a pilgrimage in 1894-1896, criticized the educational programs of Bukharan madrasas after they returned and started their efforts to reform the curriculum in the local madrasas. They suggested to introduce the subjects of tafsir and hadith in madrasas while also supporting the new Jadid schools[1,page.63]. Mulla Jurabay, one of the prominent Bukharan merchants who lived in Turkey and Arabia for an extensive period, opened a new method School in Bukhara in 1897, with the similar template of new school of Istanbul.[2]

Saeed Ahmad Vasliy, a teacher in a madrasa in Samarkand who believed that the foundation for progress and development of science in Muslim countries were at schools and madrasas. During his hajj pilgrimage, he familiarized with the educational process at the madrasas in Hijaz and Istanbul and compares them with the ones in Turkistan. He concluded that curriculum in madrasas in Turkistan were already outdated and long-term education system had more disadvantages than any good, therefore, had to be reformed. In his article he stated that "In our big cities and great madrasas, many students spend their time and money in the hope of getting education, in the end, disappointed with the education they got which gives them nothing, choses other job within 2-3 years..."[3,p.123]. The author is distressed by the fact that the younger generation wasted their time, dusting the streets with riding horses, the children of the rich graduating the schools and madrasas by bribing and ultimately bringing tragedy to their families. Vasliy emphasizes the need of study not only religious, but also secular knowledge as well in madrasas. In his article, entitled "Knowledge and the Need for Knowledge", he described the design of schools and madrasas to the building equipment of classrooms, the number of years of the study. He also mentioned the types of classes that students should take and process of exams[3, p.287].

Another prominent Turkistani hajj pilgrim who left his memoirs of his travel was Mulla Ālim Ākhun Tāshkandi. The editor-in-chief of the Turkestan regional newspaper, Mulla Olim Okhun Tashkandi, like many of his compatriots, went on a pilgrimage on October 11, 1909.[4] (Mulla Ālim Abulkasim's son started working in the newspaper editorial office since the establishment of the "Turkestan regional newspaper" since 1870 and worked with Ibrahimovs until 1875. Then he went upstairs to the Andijan volcano. In 1880 he returned to Tashkent to work as a newspaper editor.) During the trip, he wrote his experiences in the diary which became known as "Letters from the Mecca Road" and published them in the newspaper of Turkestan. During the hajj, Mulla Ālim got acquainted with the activities of mosques, schools and madrasas in Turkey and Arabia. The expanse of Friday mosques, the conveniences created for Muslims fascinated him. Mulla Ālim payed his main attention to the educational institutions operating in these cities, and he was a witness of the changes there, and also emphasized the need for the introduction of these innovations in Turkistan. In particular, the author draws the attention of the Turkish government's policy on the education of young people and calls on the Turkistanis to take an example from this.

In addition to religious sciences, secular sciences such as Astronomy, Medicine, Geometry, Chemistry also taught in the schools of Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Arabia and India at the beginning of the XX century. These subjects mostly unfamiliar or in their infancy in the syllabus of the Turkistani madrasas. Turkistani intellectuals and Jadids who were aware of the reformatory movements in wider Islamic World also were supporters of total reformation of madrasa syllabus in Central Asia. The syllabus of Turkestani madrasas were mostly filled with religious classes on the basis of educational materials developed in the Middle Ages[5,p.91].

As Mulla Ālim walked through the streets of Istanbul, he interested to visit the schools in Istanbul. He finds his way one of the ordinary schools called “Mashriq Fivzot Usmaniyy”. He was given permission to enter school get acquainted with the educational process. Mulla Ālim informs that the school was privately owned and built with 300 seats at the school director’s own expense. Eight years of schooling taught students in various subjects including History, Algebra, Arabic, Ottoman, Persian and French, Geography, and Reading the Qur’an. The head of the school took Mulla Ālim and his companion into the classrooms and introduced the students' literacy skills. The children showed their intelligence by answering the questions of their teacher admiring Mulla Ālim and companions. After seeing all the classes, the head of the school took the guests into teachers room where they were briefed about school system in Istanbul.

One of the interesting aspects of Muslim society of Turkey and Arabia was that women could walk with their faces open and perform collective prayers. At this time, women in Central Asia were veiled in *paranji* and attending in collective prayers was strictly prohibited. As Mullah Ālim continued his opinion on this topic, he mentions that: “The faces of those women are wide open and they cover their limbs. Some of the Turkish women would open their faces, walk in the streets and markets, go into shops and do business alone. But there is no custom of men staring at women on the streets and making fun of them. All men and women are at work. If a stranger mistreats the women, or talks to them to start a conversation, the police would immediately arrest the man and send him to prison.”

Mulla Ālim also made notes on laws and regulations related to the children in the Ottoman Empire. According to his observations we can assume that it was strictly forbidden for school age young children, to walk in vain on the street, in the teahouses and coffee houses. Mullah Ālim got acquainted with the documents about this particular regulation and noted that it is one of the important aspects that the Central Asians can follow : “The editor told me that when I came into the room of a Turkish judge in Istanbul and saw their rules and enlightenment, I asked the register muftis about the some of the rules, he said that judge makes questionnaire according to the manuals given to them. I read a few of the key points. What I saw in that law is hardly to be reported in the newspaper. But I saw that law by myself. The decree is written as this: “If the 16-18-year-olds are found to be idle in cafes besides the cases when they are with their parents, the police should immediately arrest them and report it to the authorities”. After reading this law, whenever I pay attention cafés and the streets and markets, there is no idle young children like the ones in Turkestan, who spend their lives in the streets. All children are engaged in school education and training. Early in the morning, it seemed that Turkish children were carrying their books to their school. In particular, the new Turk had a lot of buildings and movements in the new science and new ways. Education in all schools is a very intensive discipline”[4]. Although there were great number of madrasas in Turkestan, there were no compulsory school system were implemented for young aged children. It was one of the differences that Mulla Ālim was interested.

Until the first World War, Arabia was under the Ottoman Empire, schools and madrasas in Mecca and Medina were appointed from Turkish scholars. Also, in all educational institutions there were established procedures introduced by the Ottomans. During his stay in Medina, Mulla Ālim visited a number of madrasas and became acquainted with their activities. Among the madrasa that he has seen, describes Madrasai Muhammadiyya as the most prosperous and popular madrasa. Mulla Ālim met a student from Tashkent named Mulla Yusuf who is studying at this madrasa and visited his chapel. In the course of the interview, he asked questions about the order, teachers and provision of the madrasa. Mullah Yusuf answered his questions: “Our senior lecturer is a Turkish scholar from Istanbul. He is a great scholar. The scholars of the famous madrasas of Arabia, such as Mecca and Medina, belong to the Turkish scholars. The foundations of our madrasas come from Egypt.”[5]

In madrasa there is a specific order, if a student gets married, he will be deprived of the right to live and receive a scholarship in the madrasa campus. For this reason, many students preferred to live in a madrasa hostel and control economic stability rather than getting married[5]. Another educational institution in the city of Medina was restored, in which 200 students studied. The educators in this institution are from Istanbul Turks and they are trained teachers with high education who teach in schools. Mullah Ālim positively assessed the changes in education in the cities of Mecca and Medina and hope that there will be similar changes in Turkistan as well.[5]

During this period, the Russian Empire begins to introduce its own order in the field of education, as in all areas of Turkistan, the emirate of Bukhara, the Khiva Khanate and started forming Russian-tuzem schools. But the local people did not want their children to be educated in such schools organized by unbeliever, and they began to give their children to the schools of the new method established by the local intelligent people. Because in these schools, along with secular sciences, religious knowledge was also taught, and the introduction of innovations in the field of education in Muslim countries in schools did not cause discontent in the population that adheres to the Islamic religion.

An important aspect of Mullah Ālim's memories is that he focused on the changes in social life in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. He focused on education, youth education and the status of women mostly and wrote in his memoirs. Writing about these changes, he appreciates the progress in the political consciousness and thinking of people and acknowledges the social progress in the country. He wrote with satisfaction that the policy of education and youth in Turkestan needs reform. Mulla Ālim himself graduated from the Russian-tuzem school and worked in the editorial office "Turkiston Viloyate Gazeti" a propaganda outlet for tsarist government. Therefore, refrains from comparing the modernization of the Middle East countries with the modernity Russians brought to Turkestan. However, in his memoirs one can see the indirect comparison and voice of intellectual who admired from modernity of Muslim states. People in Turkistan were resilient to accept the modernity brought by Russians who were seen as infidels. He concluded that the modernity he experienced in Turkey and in Mecca could be brought to Turkestan and welcomed by the residents. Mullah Ālim, influenced by the development of Muslim countries during his travels, emphasized the need for radical reforms in spiritual mentality and political consciousness of the population of Turkestan, the introduction of changes in Islamic culture as well.

Conclusion

Muslims from Central Asia, along with performing the fifth act of the Islamic religion - hajj, also served as harbingers of modern reformation discussions in Muslim countries. They experienced the positive changes taking place in the socio-economic, cultural, especially educational sphere in Turkey and Arabia, began to introduce them in their native lands, and contributed to the development of these spheres. They were also aware of the political situation in those countries and often tried to adjust their belongingness and identity according to the circumstances.

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