



THE COVERAGE OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN KHANATES ON THE EVE OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE'S INVASION IN HISTORICAL WORKS

Sultonova Makhfuza Ibrohimovna
Senior Teacher of AnSU

Abstract:

The article covers the socio-political life of the khanates of Central Asia on the eve of the invasion of the Russian Empire, the attitude of the population to the policy of governance on the basis of the works of local historians and Russian politicians. Revolts in the city of Tashkent in the second half of the XIX century and their consequences are described.

Keywords: Empire, protektorat, colonial, General-governor's Office, military-political, Middle Asia, traditional society, stagnant society, tax, uprising.

Introduction

The study of the colonial system established by the Russian Empire in Turkestan requires a thorough examination, comparison, and analysis of the normative documents issued by the empire at that time, historical works, and the writings of Russian politicians. In the second half of the 19th century, Russia's military-expansionist campaigns in the region led to drastic transformations in the political, economic, and social life of the Central Asian states.

The Russian Empire conducted its invasion of Central Asia in four stages between 1864 and 1885. Within 20 years, the khanates of Central Asia were incorporated into the ranks of colonial states. The Kokand Khanate was politically dissolved in 1876, and in its place, the Fergana region was established as part of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship. The Emirate of Bukhara became a Russian protectorate in 1868, and the Khanate of Khiva followed in 1873. While Russia took control over their foreign policy, a certain degree of domestic autonomy was maintained.

The main motives behind the Russian expansion were competition for colonies among the world's developed nations, the struggle for raw material resources, and the desire to gain control over strategically significant territories. In 1861–1862,

Russian War Minister Dmitry Milyutin initially opposed military campaigns in Central Asia. However, in 1863, a report from the Orenburg Administration stating that "military campaigns in Central Asia can divert Britain's attention from Poland" led him to change his stance [6. 311].

A geographical analysis of Russia's neighboring territories reveals that, in the west, it bordered the Ottoman Empire and its colonies, while in the south and east, it shared borders with relatively weaker Asian countries. Russia's defeat in the Russo-Turkish War (1853–1856) discouraged further western expansion and redirected its military focus toward the khanates in the east. This idea was rapidly developed, and military preparations were intensified.

The ideological justification for future conquests of the khanates was expressed as follows:

"In its historical progress, Russia could only expand and develop in all spheres by enlarging its territory at the expense of weaker states. This direction was to the south and east, as the north was blocked by the ocean, and the west was dominated by the relatively more consolidated and civilized Germanic tribes. History guided Russia toward the east; in the west, only defense was possible, while the east was gradually conquered step by step." [7.]

In the conquest of the Central Asian khanates, the Russian Empire prioritized military-political factors over economic objectives. Although Russia had embarked on the path of capitalist development, its economic growth lagged behind the powerful states of Western Europe. Reaching their level and competing with them required time.

"The colonial policy of the Russian Empire was not a result of capitalist competition, but rather a means to escape from it." – These words once again highlight the highly calculated approach of the Russian Empire in its foreign policy. [4. 28]

From the second half of the 19th century, Russia's geopolitical expansion focused on the Central Asian khanates. It is important to note that the governance of these khanates was based on absolute rule, with khans wielding unlimited authority, which contributed to the prolonged preservation of a traditional society in the region.

In contrast, the struggle for parliamentary monarchy in Western European states began in the 13th century and continued into the 19th century, culminating in the



foundations of civil society. Although the Russian Empire also followed an absolute monarchy like the khanates, its social life differed significantly—especially in terms of religion, customs, culture, language, and, most importantly, worldview.

On the eve of the Russian invasion, the political and social structure of the Central Asian khanates was based on large landownership and the absolute rule of the khans. The palace officials acted as representatives of the executive power. Many of these officials were madrasa graduates who remained committed to religious values and resisted modernization efforts, which hindered state development. The incompatibility of traditional society with modernization led to stagnation. The economic, political, and military weakness of the khanates facilitated their conquest by the powerful Russian Empire.

Russian military leaders argued that the conquest of Central Asia would not require significant financial costs and that the integration of the region into the empire would not be burdensome. Reports sent to the emperor emphasized the region's favorable natural conditions and abundant resources, which would make settlement easy and cost-effective. As noted by I. Lvov, the plan to conquer Central Asia promised great benefits with minimal financial and military losses, reinforcing calls for rapid military campaigns. [2. 152.]

From the second half of the 19th century, Russia's geopolitical expansionist policy was directed toward the Central Asian khanates. It is important to note that the political governance of these khanates was based on autocracy, where khans possessed unlimited power. This system contributed to the prolonged preservation of a traditional society in the region. In contrast, in Western European states, the struggle for parliamentary monarchy had begun in the 13th century and continued into the 19th century, culminating in the formation of the foundations of civil society. Although the governance of the Russian Empire, like that of the khanates, was an absolute monarchy, its social structure significantly differed in terms of religion, customs, culture, language, and, most importantly, the worldview of its population.

On the eve of the Russian invasion, the socio-political structure of the Central Asian khanates was based on large landownership and the absolute power of the khans. The administrative officials in the royal court acted as representatives of the executive power. Most of these officials were educated in madrasas and remained



deeply committed to religious values. Their resistance to modernization hindered state development, leading to stagnation within society. The incompatibility between a traditional society and modernization resulted in societal stagnation. Consequently, the khanates, which were weak in economic, political, and military aspects, became vulnerable to conquest by a powerful empire.

Russian military leaders believed that the conquest of Central Asia would not require significant financial resources and that, after annexation, the region would not pose any economic burden on Russia. They repeatedly reported to the emperor that the region's natural conditions and wealth were highly favorable for settlement. These factors accelerated the pace of the military campaigns. As I. Lvov emphasized, the conquest of Central Asia would be highly profitable and would not lead to significant financial or military losses, thereby advocating for a swift military expedition to the region. [2. 152.]

On June 15–17, 1865, Tashkent was captured by General M.G. Cherniaev, the town of Chinaz on the Syr Darya River was occupied, and the southern approach to Tashkent was sealed. The local population had mixed reactions to the Russian conquest of Tashkent. As one of the major trade cities, Tashkent had held the status of an independent Tashkent principality until the early 19th century, but later became a contested territory between the Kokand Khanate and the Bukhara Emirate. On the eve of the Russian conquest, it was under the control of the Kokand Khanate. According to A.K. Heyns' estimates, the city had approximately 20,000 households and a population of nearly 150,000. [1. 42].

The residents of Tashkent were engaged in trade, agriculture, craftsmanship, and, to a lesser extent, animal husbandry. The city housed around 400 mosques and 10 madrasas, with each madrasa educating approximately 800 students. [1.45]. In 1809, Kokand Khan Olimkhon abolished the independence of the Tashkent principality and incorporated it into the Kokand Khanate. Prior to the Russian invasion, there had been multiple uprisings against Kokand rule in Tashkent. The period of Aziz Parvonachi's rule was particularly difficult for the people of Tashkent.

The historian Muhammad Solikhoja, in his work *Tarikhi Jadidi Toshkand*, describes the events of 1263 Hijri (1847 CE), when on the 12th of Ramadan (which fell in August of that year), a rebellion broke out in Tashkent against the policies of Aziz Parvonachi. The uprising was triggered by his decision to impose a tax of



4,000 gold coins as "iftar money" on the population to finance the army during the holy month of Ramadan. This decision was made in response to the prolonged siege and battles waged by Mullah Holbek (the former governor of Tashkent) and Khudoyorkhon against Tashkent, which had weakened the city's military defenses and depleted its weapons stockpile. Although the city had not been defeated, Aziz Parvonachi feared an impending attack from Kokand and was compelled to strengthen Tashkent's defenses and military forces.

During times of war, the Kokand Khan imposed additional taxes, such as the "copper tax" for cannon production, the "rifle tax" for firearms, and the "pack animal tax" for supplying the military with transport animals. [5. 57]. The policies of Aziz Parvonachi were also discussed by Mirzo Olim Mahmudkhoja, who noted: *"After being freed from the Kipchak siege and realizing that his treasury was empty, Aziz Parvonachi, on the advice of his close associates, imposed a 'provincial tax' on the local population. Specific tax amounts were assigned to each neighborhood of Tashkent. When news of this decision reached the city's residents, who were already suffering under Aziz Parvonachi's tyranny, they rose in rebellion under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuffboy Parchabof. Some of the city's nobles sent envoys to Kipchak governor Normuhammad Qo'shbegi. Aziz Parvonachi responded to the rebels with cannons and firearms. The insurgents gathered in the neighborhoods of Jangoh, Parchabof, and Misgar. During the battle, Aziz Parvonachi's commander, Rahimbek ibn Qozok, was wounded. Meanwhile, around a thousand men from the Beshyogoch neighborhood armed themselves with whatever weapons they could find and joined the rebels in Parchabof. Aziz Parvonachi sought refuge in his fortress.

At that moment, Shodmonkhoja Parvonachi arrived from Qurama with Normuhammad Qo'shbegi. They closed the twelve gates of Tashkent and, with the help of the people, laid siege to the fortress. Normuhammad Qo'shbegi set up camp near the Beshyogoch gate. Two weeks into the siege, Aziz Parvonachi's soldiers began deserting him. Eventually, he was forced to surrender, after which he and his family were sent to Kokand. Later, he was transferred to Margilan, under the custody of Otabiy. A few months later, he was brought back to Kokand, accused of sedition, executed, and buried in a large cemetery. Normuhammad Qo'shbegi then assumed governorship of Tashkent." [2.15].



Based on the aforementioned information, it can be concluded that on the eve of the Russian invasion, the local population was in a difficult socio-economic situation, with strong discontent toward political governance and little attention paid to external threats. The internal conflicts among different social strata and the indifference of government representatives toward the living conditions of the population exacerbated the societal crisis. This, in turn, undermined national unity, which is a crucial factor in the political stability of a state.

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