

**CRITIQUE OF AUTHORITY AND SOCIETY IN THE EMIRATE OF BUKHARA  
(LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES)**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the evolution of critical thought in the Emirate of Bukhara at the turn of the century. Drawing on the works of Ahmad Donish, Abdurauf Fitrat, and the diaries of Sadri Ziyo, it analyzes the systemic crisis of the Manghit despotism. Particular attention is paid to Jadid criticism of administrative arbitrariness, corruption in the judicial system, and the stagnation of Islamic education. This article is relevant in that it primarily examines the views of local authors closely connected to the political situation in the Emirate from within, and does not consider an Orientalist perspective.

**Keywords:** Bukhara Emirate, Manghit Dynasty, Ahmad Donish, Abdurauf Fitrat, Sadri Ziyo, Jadidism, critique of despotism, ijthad reform.

**Аннотация**

В данной статье рассматривается эволюция критической мысли в Бухарском эмирате на рубеже веков. Опираясь на работы Ахмада Дониша, Абдурауфа Фитрата и дневники Садри Зийо, анализируется системный кризис мангитского деспотизма. Особое внимание уделяется критике административным произволом, коррупцией в судебной системе и стагнацией исламского образования со стороны джадидов. Актуальность статьи заключается в том, что она в первую очередь рассматривает взгляды местных авторов, тесно связанных с политической ситуацией в эмирате изнутри, и не учитывает ориенталистскую повестку.

**Ключевые слова:** Бухарский эмират, династия Мангит, Ахмад Дониш, Абдурауф Фитрат, Садри Зийо, джадидизм, критика деспотизма, реформа иджтихада.

Bukhara at the end of the 19th century was a complex sociocultural phenomenon. On the one hand, it retained its status as the "Dome of Islam" (Qubbat al-Islam) and a center of pilgrimage. On the other hand, as contemporaries noted, the state under the rule of the emirs Muzaffar and Abdallahad had become a symbol of administrative and intellectual impasse. Internal criticism emanating from the local intelligentsia was directed not against religion, but against its distortion by the ruling elite.

In the first chapter of the book "History of the Manghit Dynasty," entitled "Unrest in the Emirate under Emir Daniyal and the Governance System of Emir Shah Murad," the author lays the foundation for his critique of the ruling dynasty. Donish describes the reign of Emir Daniyal (1758–1785) as a time of "obvious discord in state and religious affairs." Classes ceased in madrassas, and prayers ceased in mosques.

The emir's sons, who "openly engaged in debauchery," were appointed to high positions. The grand vizier was Davlat Kushbegi, described as a "cruel bloodsucker," and the chief judge (qazi-kalon) was Nizamaddin, who, despite his Sayyid descent, openly drank wine and accepted bribes.

The chapter contrasts this decline with the reforms of Emir Shah Murad (Emir Masum), whom Donish considers "the renewer of the century." Shah Murad led an ascetic lifestyle, wore poor man's clothing, personally restored waqfs, and abolished illegal taxes (oluk and soluk).

Donish uses this historical contrast to demonstrate that a state's prosperity depends on the personal qualities of the ruler and his adherence to the norms of justice.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Abdurauf Fitrat took up the baton of criticism. His method consisted of using the image of the "foreigner" to expose the internal ills of Bukharan society.

Fitrat described the appointment of officials (beks) in the provinces as a "license to plunder." Officials viewed the lands under their control as personal loot, disregarding the needs of the population.

Fitrat mercilessly criticized the madrasa environment (of which there were over 200 in Bukhara). He pointed out that instead of studying, students (mullah-vachcha) were engaged in the mechanical memorization of texts, while ulema were selling student cells (hujras), turning waqfs into personal income. In his works, he denounced the "bad scholars" (ulamo-i su) who interpreted the Quran to please the ruler, justifying his every whim.

A unique source is the diary of Sharifjon Makhdum (Sadri Ziyó), who held high positions, including that of chief judge (qazi-kalona).

Ziyó describes in detail the failure of attempts to reform the emirate. The publication of the 1917 Manifesto led only to an upsurge in violence: conservative clergy and a fanatical mob massacred supporters of reform in Registan Square. Even as part of the system, Ziyó acknowledged that qazis (judges) were often "devourers of the unlawful." The outcome of a case was decided not by law, but by the size of the bribe or personal connections. His diary records "new Jadid murders" (maraka-i jadid-kushi), when people were imprisoned and tortured for possessing a newspaper or modern clothing. Criticism of the government also focused on the catastrophic state of the economy. According to sources, the tax burden in the emirate had no legal basis. The land tax (kharaj) was officially set at 1/8 or 1/5 of the harvest, but in reality, officials confiscated up to 75% of the produce. This led to the mass impoverishment of farmers and their flight to the Turkestan Governorate-General. The officials who collected taxes received no salary from the treasury and lived solely on the "surplus" confiscated from the people. Enormous revenues from waqfs, which were supposed to support 200 madrasas in Bukhara, were absorbed by a small circle of mudarris and administrator families.

The Jadids, and especially Fitrat in his work "Oila," linked the decline of the emirate to the disenfranchisement of women. Critics noted that while men spent their time in teahouses, women were completely excluded from public and intellectual life, locked behind the chador from the age of 12.

Fitrat argued that an uneducated mother was incapable of raising a defender of the homeland. He viewed the education of women as a religious obligation criminally ignored by the authorities.

By the early 20th century, this criticism had taken shape. The Jadid movement, which became the main opposition force, demanded the introduction of secular subjects (geography, history, arithmetic) in schools. The reactionary clergy (Qadimists) declared these reforms "heresy," using denunciations to suppress the new-method schools. Fitrat and other reformers called for a return to the right of independent judgment (ijtihad), criticizing the government for its blind imitation (taqlid) of outdated medieval commentaries.

Adib Khalid views Jadidism not simply as a school reform, but as a broad intellectual movement. The Jadids of Bukhara closely followed world events. Sadri Ziyó's diaries mention the reforms of the Emperor of Japan (the Mikado), the governmental structure of the Ottoman Empire, and the laws of European countries as potential role models. The newspaper "Bukhoroi Sharif" (1912) became a crucial instrument of change, helping to shape a new public consciousness. Tatar newspapers (such as "Vakt") were also widely read, bringing constitutionalist ideas into Bukhara.

Due to the Emir's harsh despotism, educational activities were often clandestine. This secret society ("Children's Education"), founded in 1910, not only opened schools but also sent talented youth to study abroad—to Istanbul and later to Germany.

The Jadids introduced a phonetic method of literacy (usuli savtiya), which allowed one to learn the alphabet in a few months instead of years. This provoked fierce resistance from the conservative clergy (Kadimists), who saw it as "heresy."

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a new socio-political environment emerged in Turkestan, driven by the development of printing presses, Russian-Muslim schools, and the Jadid movement. Periodicals became an important tool for criticizing the traditional regime, including the rule of the Emir of Bukhara. Although censorship was extremely strict within the Emirate of Bukhara itself, opposition ideas were actively published in newspapers in the Turkestan region and beyond.

The following publications are associated with discrediting the government, as well as key publications that played a role in criticizing the Emirate.

1. "Taraqiy" (1906), edited by Ismail Obidov. One of the first Jadid newspapers in Turkestan. It advocated educational reform, limiting the arbitrary exercise of the clergy, and renewing Muslim society. Although direct criticism of the emir was suppressed, articles on "ignorance," "stagnation," and "tyranny" effectively condemned the existing order in Bukhara. As a result, the newspaper was quickly closed by the authorities.

2. "Shukhrat" (1907) continued the line of "Taraqiy." It published materials on the need for reform and condemned fanaticism and corruption. Through allegories and journalism, it addressed the problems of Bukharan governance.

3. "Samarkand" (1913–1915) Edited by Mahmudhoja Behbudi, the newspaper became one of the most important centers of Jadid thought. Its articles criticized the backwardness of the educational system in Bukhara; the lack of secular sciences; economic stagnation; and the arbitrary actions of officials. Behbudi openly wrote about the need for reform in the Emirate of Bukhara and the modernization of the state system. 4. "Sadoi Turkiston" (1914–1915) was edited by Munavvar Kary Abdurashidkhanov. The publication actively promoted ideas of enlightenment and national revival. Criticism of the emir was veiled, but in the context of discussions of the need for constitutional reforms, it became obvious.

5. "Bukhor-i Sharif" (1912–1913) was published in Kagan (New Bukhara), a territory under Russian control.

This was one of the most daring publications. The newspaper directly criticized the emirate's system of governance; raised the issue of judicial reforms; condemned corruption; and demanded reforms modeled on the Ottoman Empire. The newspaper was closed at the request of the Bukharan authorities.

6. "Oyina" (1913–1915) was also published under the direction of Behbudi. It was a magazine, not a newspaper, but it played a huge role in shaping public opinion. Oyin published articles on despotism; the need for shura (consultative governance); reforming madrassas; and the rights of the people. Criticism of the emirate was combined with Islamic argumentation, making it particularly persuasive for a Muslim audience.

The criticism voiced by Donish, Fitrat, and Ziyo demonstrated that the Bukhara Emirate had exhausted its internal development potential by 1920. Despotism, corruption, and the rejection of education rendered the state unviable. The fall of Bukhara in September 1920 was the logical conclusion of a systemic crisis that intellectuals had been describing for decades.

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