



THE ROLE OF MADRASAS IN THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE EMIRATE OF BUKHARA IN THE LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

This article examines the role of madrasas in the social life of the Emirate of Bukhara. The study analyzes their influence on education, religious and spiritual development, legal and administrative structures, as well as cultural life. Particular attention is given to their economic foundations, financial support through waqf revenues, and their functions within the judiciary and state administration. The article also highlights the scientific and educational significance of Bukhara's madrasas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the internal conflicts among scholars, and their impact on society. Thus, it is argued that madrasas in the Emirate of Bukhara were not only centers of religious and scholarly education but also important institutions of broader social and cultural life.

Keywords: Madrasahs, Education, Waqf, Bukhara emirate, Socio-cultural life, Mudarris, Student, Islam, Religious sciences.

Introduction

During the period of the Emirate of Bukhara, madrasas functioned as important socio-cultural institutions of society. They served not only as centers of religious education but also played a fundamental role in shaping social, spiritual, legal, and cultural life. Alongside Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, and fiqh, disciplines such as logic, philosophy, mathematics, and literature were also taught in these institutions. Through madrasas, religious cadres such as imams, muftis, teachers,



and judges were trained. Scholars played a significant role in the application of Sharia principles within state governance and the legal system. Economically, madrasas operated mainly on waqf revenues, which enabled them to function independently. Their activities also stimulated the development of poetry, literature, and the arts. Conflicts within religious circles directly influenced the functioning of madrasas and the status of scholars. Thus, madrasas emerged as a central force in determining the political stability and spiritual life of the country. Studying their history is of great scholarly significance for understanding the socio-cultural development of Bukhara.

Research Methods and Methodology

This study is based on the historical-analytical method and examines the role of madrasas in the socio-cultural life of the Bukhara Emirate through written sources, archival documents, and modern scholarly literature. Scholars have provided diverse perspectives on the role of madrasas in the Bukhara Emirate. O. Olufsen emphasized that madrasas were not mosques but rather the highest institutions of Islamic education, where both religious and secular sciences were taught [1]. R. Kholiqova highlighted the transformation of religious authority, noting that by the late 19th century the role of the shaykhulislam was effectively replaced by the qazikalan [2]. A. A. Semenov stressed the strong influence of religious representatives in political life, observing that the ulama sometimes compelled the emir to change decrees [3]. S. Ayni's memoirs provide vivid descriptions of madrasa life, festivities, and the cultural environment surrounding these institutions [4][5]. T. G. Tukhtametov analyzed Russian–Bukhara relations and their impact on the emirate's internal institutions [6]. Mirza Badi-Divan shed light on the hierarchy of religious-administrative offices within the central government [7]. Fitrat critically assessed the shortcomings of madrasas, pointing out their inability to prevent widespread bid'a practices and highlighting internal conflicts among the ulama.

Results

Madrasas played an important role in the social life of the Bukhara Emirate. They influenced not only religious affairs but also scientific, cultural, and



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administrative spheres. Firstly, the Emirate's madrasas held great prestige in the fields of education and scholarship. They served as the primary educational institutions in Bukhara, providing instruction in both religious and secular sciences. Alongside Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, and fiqh, subjects such as philosophy, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and literature were also taught. The scholars who graduated from these madrasas contributed significantly to the intellectual development of the region. Regarding the Emirate's madrasas, O. Olufsen noted that they were not places of worship but the highest institutions of Islamic education. According to him, students typically entered these institutions after the age of 13, having previously learned to read the Qur'an in elementary schools (maktabs)[1:378].

Secondly, madrasas played an immensely significant role in the religious and spiritual life of the country. They functioned as the primary institutions of Islamic education. Madrasas served as centers for training religious personnel such as imams, muftis, and mudarrises. They held a decisive role in shaping the social order based on the principles of Sharia

Madrasas, which had a major influence on the administrative and legal system of the Emirate's social life, trained jurists (fuqaho) and judges (qozi). This ensured the application of Sharia law in state governance and the judicial system. Those who held the position of qazikalan (chief judge) of the Emirate were usually educated in madrasas. One of the highest religious officials of the Emirate, the shaykhulislam was considered the supreme religious authority in the state during the 17th–18th centuries. Later, his role was primarily limited to examining petitions (arzs) and addressing issues related to the Prophet and his caliphs. By the late 19th – early 20th centuries, the office of the shaykhulislam was effectively replaced by that of the qazikalan[2:69].

In the Emirate of Bukhara, madrasas and the scholarly class (ulama) served as the main pillars of society, being closely connected with the legal, religious, and political spheres of life. The Sharia judiciary was administered by scholars educated in the madrasas, whose primary goal was to ensure legal justice and adherence to religious law. Moreover, the ulama played a significant role in governance, often influencing the emir's decisions. On this point, A. A. Semenov notes that “religious representatives in many cases voiced objections to certain



decrees of the emir, compelling him to alter them, which placed the emir in a difficult position.” In the Emirate of Bukhara, religious authorities oversaw the courts, public morality, and education, thereby assuming responsibility for their regulation[3:66].

In the country’s economic life, higher and secondary educational institutions such as madrasas exerted a moderate influence. They were largely financed through waqf endowments and possessed considerable economic resources. Madrasas also impacted the systems of craftsmanship, trade, and landownership in Bukhara. Some of them owned markets and landed estates, thereby holding an important place in the economic sphere [4:48].

In the development of art and culture within the emirate, madrasas likewise played a moderate role. Literature, poetry, and music were cultivated in these institutions, and many poets and writers received their education in madrasas. However, due to strict religious control, the development of music and visual arts was limited. S. Ayni notes that affluent students often gathered in circles with poets and instrumental musicians. He also records that among students, there was a passion for poetry and verse writing, with some choosing literary pseudonyms even before composing their first poem.[4:66]

Madrasas were primarily oriented toward training religious and scholarly cadres, while military specialists were usually prepared in special military schools or through practical training within the emirate’s army. Therefore, the influence of madrasas on military affairs was relatively limited. However, the position of Mufti Askar existed in the emirate, and it was typically held by individuals who had completed madrasa education. The Qazi Askar—directly subordinate to the judicial authority—was responsible for adjudicating military crimes committed by soldiers during service, in battles, or during campaigns. Some sources also mention that such cases were handled by the naqib.

Thus, in the Bukhara Emirate, madrasas exerted a strong influence in the fields of education, religion, law, and administration, while their impact on the economy and culture was moderate, and their role in the military sphere was rather restricted. Within the emirate’s social life, the science of fiqh held particular significance; its scholars were recognized as defenders of legal and sharia norms and interpreters of laws. The judicial system functioned under strict



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specialization, whereby each official in the qozilik (judicial) office performed only the duties within his authority. Although the judicial structure adhered to a well-defined system through the madrasa-trained scholars, unlike medieval Western countries, the courts of the emirate were not divided into religious and secular courts.

Madrasas played an essential role in supplying cadres to the qozilik authority. The judicial institution was headed by the Qazi al-Quzzat (chief judge), under whom scribes (mirzas) and clerks (mulozims) served. The Qazi al-Quzzat was regarded as the chief judge of the city of Bukhara. The mirzas were responsible for record-keeping within the judicial office, while the mulozims conducted investigative procedures.

Madrasas also played an important role in the activities of the Diwan al-Ulama, (devon al-ulamo) an advisory body that assisted and counseled the judicial system (qozilik). This institution included muftis and a'lams as active members. According to historical accounts, a council consisting of twelve muftis operated within this body[9:2].

In the central administration of the emirate, several ranks and titles existed, among which four were considered the most significant and directly connected to the government. Firstly, the Shaykhal-Islam – a religious titleholder – was responsible for overseeing and supervising religious affairs. The Qozi Askar was an official in charge of military matters and adjudicating military crimes.

Secondly, the A'lam was a jurist who issued fatwas on legal matters in the state. Military muftis, on the other hand, were responsible for issuing fatwas for the army, particularly during the ruler's journeys to other regions or during military campaigns.

Thirdly, the Muhtasib oversaw public adherence to Islamic prohibitions and encouraged the performance of virtuous deeds.

Fourthly, teachers and mudarrises held a highly respected status within the emirate, with their primary duty being to educate students and nurture them according to the principles of sharia. It should be emphasized that future judges, beks, and other officials were required to receive their training and education under these figures[6:17].



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In addition to these, there were four other honorary offices which the emir directly conferred upon individuals of notable social or religious standing, often those from the sayyid class. These included the titles Mir Asad, Fayzi, Sadr, and Sudur. If the title of Fayzi was conferred upon a scholar or a sayyid, he was entrusted with supervising the muhtasib of the outer districts of the sacred city of Bukhara. If the title of Mir Asad was granted, he was authorized to carry out supervisory duties over the sayyids in rabats (small settlements) located within a farsang's distance. The Sadr managed the financial accounts of waqf properties located within the rabats of Bukhara city, while the Sudur oversaw the administration of waqfs situated outside the rabats[7:94].

During the Bukhara Emirate, two main groups emerged within the religious circles – the Bukharans (bukhariylar) and the Kolobis (ko'lobilar). The tension between them left a deep imprint on the socio-religious life of the Emirate. According to Fitrat, the Bukharans represented the scholarly milieu that had developed in Bukhara and its surrounding areas, while the Kolobis were scholars originating from Eastern Bukhara. This conflict reached its peak during the tenure of Qozikalon Sadridin Mulla To'hmaq o'g'li (1863–1865, 1869–1870). He was notorious for his lack of religious knowledge and even for misreading verses of the Qur'an. Furthermore, he introduced the so-called amiynona tax, which had no basis in Sharia, and redirected the revenues from waqf properties into the Amir's treasury. As a result, many religious positions were granted to scholars from Kolob, provoking sharp dissatisfaction among Bukhara's scholarly elite. Resistance was initially led by Mufti Burhoniddin and Oxund Mulla G'iyosiddin, and later continued by Shaykh al-Islam Baqokhoja, Masnaf, and Qozikalon Sharifxon Maxdum. The struggle between the Bukharan and Kolobi scholars persisted for many years, exerting a significant influence on both the religious and socio-political processes of the Emirate[10:1].

Although the madrasas of the Emirate served as institutions that sought to uphold moral order and discipline in society, they were not fully successful in instilling these principles among the population. In his "Rahbari Najot", Fitrat criticizes the practice of seeking intercession from spirits during cemetery visits. Citing examples from the Qur'an and Hadith, he emphasized that one should instead honor the memory of ancestors. Fitrat's deliberate attention to this matter



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indicates that practices of bid'a (innovations) and shirk (polytheistic tendencies) were widespread among the people. Ideally, the madrasas should have played a key role in preventing such practices [8:40].

At the same time, the madrasas of the Bukhara Emirate were not only centers of scholarly and religious learning but also hubs of broad social and cultural life. They brought together various layers of society and became focal points for important public events and cultural activities. While the Amir conducted affairs of state, festivities and popular gatherings were often organized near his residence. For instance, in front of the Mir Arab madrasa, public celebrations, ceremonies, and folk games were held, accompanied by the sounds of surnay and nog'ora. Around the madrasas, other aspects of community life also took shape. Craft stalls, marketplaces, and squares for religious assemblies developed nearby, turning these areas into active centers of commerce and social interaction.

The role of madrasas as social and cultural centers is also described by Sadriddin Ayni in his memoirs. In recounting one of his first visits to the Mir Arab madrasa, he recalls accidentally coming across a festivity. His father explained to him that the event was called chavki, and that it usually took place in a courtyard outside the Amir's palace. Ayni records that on this occasion, however, the celebration was being held within the courtyard of the Kalon Mosque and the Mir Arab madrasa[5:201].

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that during the Bukhara Emirate, madrasas served as the intellectual and educational centers of society. Alongside religious sciences, they also taught secular knowledge such as philosophy, logic, and medicine. Madrasas trained religious scholars based on Sharia principles, playing a significant role in state administration and the judicial system. However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they lagged behind modern developments and faced an educational crisis. Their influence on economic and cultural life was moderate, contributing only partially to the development of literature and the arts. Thus, while madrasas held a decisive role in the political, religious, and cultural life of society, the process of decline diminished their impact.



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