BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg
BG PULSE JOURNAL

MIGRATION AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF THE IRANIAN POPULATION IN THE EMIRATE OF BUKHARA

Gulshan Sadirova Qandiyorovna
Master's Student, Asia International University

Abstract. This article examines the migration of the Iranian population into the territory of the Emirate of Bukhara during the 18th–19th centuries, the patterns of their settlement in the cities and oases, and the processes of their adaptation to the local social environment. The study identifies the military, economic, and political factors behind this migration and analyzes the occupational activities and social standing of the Iranians. Particular attention is devoted to the stages of ethnocultural integration that unfolded through religious affiliation, the linguistic environment, and marriage ties.

Keywords: Emirate of Bukhara, Iranians, migration, social adaptation, slave trade, Shiism, ethnocultural integration, ethnic group.

Introduction

The Emirate of Bukhara, one of the major political and commercial centres of Central Asia, embodied a multi-ethnic environment for many centuries. Alongside the local Uzbek and Tajik population, ethnic groups that had arrived from other regions in various periods also lived here. One such group is the segment of the population referred to in the historical literature as the "Iranians", who originated chiefly from the lands of Iran and Khorasan. Their migration into the oasis and their subsequent assimilation into local society constitute one of the intriguing pages of the region's ethnic history.

The study of the Iranian question carries significance not only in a narrow ethnographic sense; it also serves as an important source for understanding the social relations within the emirate, the system of the slave trade, and the degree of religious tolerance. This is because the formation of this group was directly bound up with military campaigns, the fate of those taken captive, and the functioning of the trade routes.

This article sheds light on the causes and stages of the Iranian population's migration into the territory of the Emirate of Bukhara, identifies their settlement in towns and villages and their principal occupations, and analyzes the process of their social and cultural rapprochement with the local population. The research was conducted on the basis of historical-comparative and descriptive methods.

Historical Causes and Stages of the Migration

The migration of the Iranian population into the Bukhara oasis can be explained by several interrelated factors. The most important of these was the political disintegration that occurred in Iran in the mid-18th century and the turmoil that intensified after the end of Nadir Shah's reign. The weakening of the central authority turned the border regions — especially the areas around Khorasan and Merv — into a vortex of constant plunder and military raids. It was precisely these conditions that created the ground for many people to be torn from their homeland and brought to neighbouring lands.

The second important source of migration was the system of the slave trade. As a result of raids organized by Turkmen tribes and the emirate's troops, Iranians taken captive were brought to the markets of Bukhara and Khiva and sold. According to historical records, the majority of these

captives were drawn into farming, handicrafts, and household labour. In this way, a large group — uniform in its origin and used as a labour resource — began to take shape within the emirate.

The third direction of migration was voluntary in nature and was connected with commerce and professional activity. Iranian merchants, artisans, and clergy came to Bukhara in pursuit of their own interests and, over time, settled here permanently. Unlike those brought by force, such people held a relatively free status from the very outset.

The migration process can be conventionally divided into two major stages. The first stage corresponds to the second half of the 18th century and is characterized mainly by the mass importation of captives. The second stage spans the 19th century, during which the group expanded through natural increase as well as through trade relations. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the strengthening of the Russian Empire's influence and the formal restriction of the slave trade brought about fundamental changes in the status of the Iranians.

Settlement and Occupational Activity of the Iranians

The Iranians who were brought to, and who settled in, the Emirate of Bukhara made their homes mainly in the large cities and the oases surrounding them. The capital, Bukhara, as well as centres such as Samarkand, Karmana, and Shahrisabz, are regarded as the areas of their densest settlement. In the cities, members of this group frequently lived clustered together in separate neighbourhoods, which made it possible to preserve a distinctive way of life and internal solidarity. In the rural areas, they engaged in farming and horticulture and rapidly became integrated into the local economic system.

The occupational activity of the Iranians was extremely varied. Some of them gained renown in various branches of handicraft — weaving, pottery, jewellery-making, and tailoring. Others engaged in trade, performing the role of intermediaries between the domestic and foreign markets. Owing to their industriousness and professional skill, many Iranians succeeded in securing a notable place in the economic life of the cities.

It is worth emphasizing separately that a group of Iranians was drawn into close service at the emir's court. They were widely employed in the military units, the guard system, and the administrative apparatus. Such service enabled certain individuals to attain high rank and prestige, and even to occupy influential positions in affairs of state. This circumstance demonstrates that the social composition of the group was not uniform and that various strata existed within it.

Social Adaptation and Ethnocultural Integration

The adaptation of the Iranians to Bukharan society was a complex and protracted process. The most important aspect that determined the distinctiveness of this process was the matter of religious affiliation. A large part of the Iranians adhered to the Shia denomination, whereas the local population belonged mainly to Sunnism. Although this difference between the denominations initially gave rise to a certain caution and reserve, over time practical cooperation and mutual tolerance took shape between the two communities.

The linguistic environment emerged as one of the principal factors that accelerated integration. Because the mother tongue of the population that came from Iran and Khorasan was close to Persian, they blended relatively easily into the Tajik-speaking urban milieu. Subsequent generations also freely mastered the Uzbek language and shifted to bilingual communication. The closeness of language eased cultural exchange and opened the way to the interweaving of customs and rituals.

Marriage ties likewise played a substantial role in social rapprochement. The tradition of marrying within the community, observed at first, gradually lost its rigidity, and kinship bonds with the local population grew stronger. The increase in such mixed families blurred ethnic boundaries and accelerated the merging of the Iranians into the general population.

In the second half of the 19th century, once the slave trade had been formally restricted and many Iranians had obtained their personal freedom, their social standing changed fundamentally. As free citizens, they began to take an even more active part in handicrafts, commerce, and administrative spheres. Nevertheless, the group long preserved certain of its distinctive features — its religious traditions, family customs, and historical memory. This reflects a particular balance between organic rapprochement with the local culture and the avoidance of complete absorption into it.

Cultural Heritage and the Community in Later Periods

Beyond their role in the economy and administration, the Iranians left a tangible imprint on the material and spiritual culture of the oasis. Their experience in fine handicrafts enriched local traditions of weaving, ceramics, and metalwork, while elements of Persian culinary practice, music, and decorative art gradually entered the everyday life of the urban population. This cultural exchange was reciprocal: just as the newcomers absorbed local customs, they also contributed motifs and skills that became woven into the shared heritage of Bukhara.

Religious life occupied a special place in the self-perception of the community. As adherents of Shia Islam in a predominantly Sunni milieu, the Iranians maintained their own devotional practices, most notably the commemorative rituals of the month of Muharram. These observances served as an important marker of collective identity, helping the group to retain a sense of distinctiveness even as it drew closer to the surrounding society. At the same time, shared adherence to Islam as a whole provided a broad common ground that softened denominational boundaries in daily interaction.

The community did not disappear with the political changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Descendants of the earlier migrants, locally referred to in some sources as “eroni”, continued to inhabit the historic quarters of Bukhara and Samarkand, preserving fragments of their language, family customs, and historical memory. It was precisely this continuity that later allowed ethnographers and historians to reconstruct the group’s origins and social organization. Field surveys and archival materials, including the detailed urban studies of O. A. Sukhareva, remain among the principal sources for understanding the place of the Iranians in the multilayered society of the Bukhara oasis.

Conclusion

The Iranian population of the Emirate of Bukhara constitutes a distinctive group that took shape as an inseparable part of the region’s ethnic history. Their migration into the oasis was bound not to a single cause but to a combination of several factors, such as military campaigns, the slave trade, and voluntary commercial migration. This process unfolded step by step throughout the 18th–19th centuries and left a notable mark on the composition of the emirate’s population.

The social adaptation of the Iranians proceeded successfully owing to their industriousness, professional skill, and adaptability to the local environment. Despite the difference in religious denomination, linguistic closeness and marriage ties became decisive factors of ethnocultural integration. Ultimately, while retaining certain of its traditional features, this group merged organically with local society and enriched the multilayered cultural profile of the Bukhara oasis. Future research on the topic should be deepened further on the basis of archival documents and field ethnographic materials.

References

1. Sukhareva O.A. Bukhara in the 19th – Early 20th Century (The Late Feudal City and Its Population). – Moscow: Nauka, 1966. – 328 p. (in Russian)
2. Khanykov N.V. A Description of the Bukhara Khanate. – Saint Petersburg, 1843. – 279 p. (in Russian)
3. Meyendorff E.K. A Journey from Orenburg to Bukhara. – Moscow: Nauka, 1975. – 182 p. (in Russian)
4. Gafurov B.G. The Tajiks: The Earliest, Ancient, and Medieval History. – Moscow: Nauka, 1972. – 664 p. (in Russian)
5. Logofet D.N. The Bukhara Khanate under the Russian Protectorate. – Saint Petersburg, 1911. (in Russian)