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THE ROLE OF THE "RSHNOHI" ("ROSHNAYI") NEWSPAPER IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT OF BUKHARIAN JEWS

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Abstract: This article examines the enlightenment movement that emerged among the Bukharian Jews in the Turkestan region at the beginning of the 20th century and its development stages. Based on historical sources, the study provides a systematic analysis of the journalistic role, educational ideas, and historical significance of the first newspaper published in the Judeo-Tajik language-"Rshnohi"-which played a crucial role in the socio-cultural awakening, educational reforms, and national self-awareness processes of this community.

Keywords: Bukharian Jews, enlightenment movement, "Rshnohi" newspaper, Turkestan press, Jadidism, socio-cultural awakening, Judeo-Tajik language, Emirate of Bukhara.

BUXORO YAHUDIYLARI MA'RIFATPARVARLIK HARAKATIDA "RSHNOHI" ("ROSHNAYI") GAZETASINING TUTGAN O'RNI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada XX asr boshlarida Turkiston o'lkasi, xususan Buxoro yahudiylari o'rtasida vujudga kelgan ma'rifatparvarlik harakati va uning rivojlanish bosqichlari tadqiq etiladi. Tadqiqotda mazkur jamoaning ijtimoiy-madaniy uyg'onishi, ta'lim tizimidagi islohotlar hamda milliy o'zlikni anglash jarayonlarida yahudiy-tojik tilida nashr etilgan ilk matbuot nashri - "Rshnohi" gazetasining publitsistik o'rni, ma'rifatparvarlik g'oyalari va tarixiy ahamiyati manbalar asosida tizimli tahlil qilingan.

Kalit so'zlar: Buxoro yahudiylari, ma'rifatparvarlik harakati, "Rshnohi" gazetasi, Turkiston matbuoti, jadidchilik, ijtimoiy-madaniy uyg'onish, yahudiy-tojik tili, Buxoro amirligi.

РОЛЬ ГАЗЕТЫ «РШНОХИ» («РОШНАИ») В ПРОСВЕТИТЕЛЬСКОМ ДВИЖЕНИИ БУХАРСКИХ ЕВРЕЕВ

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуется просветительское движение, возникшее среди бухарских евреев в Туркестанском крае в начале XX века, и этапы его развития. В исследовании на основе исторических источников системно анализируются публицистическая роль, просветительские идеи и историческое значение первой печатной

газеты на еврейско-таджикском языке - «Ршнохи», сыгравшей важную роль в социокультурном пробуждении, реформировании системы образования и процессах национального самосознания данной общины.

Ключевые слова: бухарские евреи, просветительское движение, газета «Ршнохи», пресса Туркестана, джадидизм, социокультурное пробуждение, еврейско-таджикский язык, Бухарский эмират.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the geopolitical and socio-cultural landscape of the Turkestan General-Governorship and the neighboring Emirate of Bukhara underwent a profound intellectual transformation characterized by the convergence of traditional community structures with the globalizing forces of print capitalism, modern education, and imperial institutional shifts. Within this highly complex historical matrix, the Bukharian Jewish community-a distinct ethno-religious group with deep civilizational roots in Central Asia-found itself at a critical socio-historical crossroads. For centuries, the community had maintained its distinct identity within the Islamic framework of the regional khanates through localized socioeconomic functions and adherence to traditional rabbinic education centered in the khomlo (traditional religious elementary schools). However, the systemic inclusion of Central Asia into the economic and administrative spheres of the Russian Empire, combined with the emergence of regional Islamic modernism known as Jadidism, catalyzed an unprecedented intellectual awakening among the Bukharian Jewish intelligentsia.

This indigenous minority enlightenment movement sought to systematically reform the community's outdated educational systems, foster linguistic modernization, and navigate the dual challenges of preserving their ethno-religious heritage while adapting to the demands of modern civil society. At the absolute vanguard of this dynamic socio-cultural and educational transformation stood the emergence of the local Judeo-Tajik language press, which served as both the voice and the engine of the community's modernization efforts. Specifically, the publication of the pioneering newspaper Rshnohi (also transliterated from historical source typography as Roshnayi, meaning "The Light"), established in Samarkand around 1910, marked a historic turning point. Far from being a mere medium for regional news or merchant announcements, Rshnohi functioned as a powerful, transformative socio-philosophical platform that introduced Enlightenment ideals, advocated for pedagogical reform, and laid the institutional foundation for modern civic consciousness and social immunity among the Jews of Central Asia.

To comprehensively evaluate the historical significance and ideological impact of Rshnohi, this study critically contextualizes the publication within the multi-layered historical, socioeconomic, and intellectual heritage of the Bukhara oasis. Historically, the Bukharian Jewish community had developed a unique linguistic and cultural identity by adopting a localized dialect of New Persian, known as Judeo-Tajik, written in the Hebrew script. This linguistic medium served as the primary repository of their communal memory, liturgical literature, and everyday commercial transactions, acting as a vital bridge between Jewish cultural distinctiveness and the broader Persianate intellectual world of Central Asia. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a notable demographic and economic expansion of the community, driven by their active participation in the regional cotton trade, industrial textile manufacturing, and transnational commerce connecting Bukhara, Samarkand, Moscow, and Western Europe. This

newfound economic capital directly facilitated the emergence of a highly educated, forward-thinking merchant and intellectual elite who recognized that long-term social stability and communal progress could no longer be sustained through cultural isolation or obsolete educational models. This realization was deeply influenced by the broader regional intellectual environment, particularly the revolutionary educational and social philosophies of the Muslim Jadid reformers of Bukhara and Samarkand. The Jadidist emphasis on usul-i jadid (the new-method schools), secular scientific literacy, and the strategic utilization of the printing press to eliminate social ignorance directly mirrored the aspirations of the progressive Bukharian Jewish modernists, who sought to construct an analogous, culturally specific model of enlightenment.

Operating within this vibrant intellectual environment, Rshnohi emerged as a critical institutional vehicle for social critique, language standardization, and cultural mobilization. Prior to the establishment of a localized Judeo-Tajik press, the community was largely dependent on Hebrew publications imported from Jerusalem or European Russia, which were often inaccessible to the broader, non-rabbinic segments of the population. By utilizing the colloquial Judeo-Tajik language as its primary editorial medium, Rshnohi effectively democratized access to information and modern knowledge, bridging the traditional gap between the elite rabbinic leadership and the general public. The pages of the newspaper became a dynamic public sphere where progressive editors and contributors systematically deconstructed the structural flaws of the traditional khomlo system, arguing passionately for the integration of modern secular disciplines-such as history, geography, mathematics, and foreign languages-into the community's school curriculum. Furthermore, the newspaper actively championed the civic, economic, and educational rights of the community, fostering a nuanced sense of national and regional self-awareness that enabled Bukharian Jews to redefine their social position within a rapidly changing imperial system. By exposing its readers to global political events, scientific discoveries, and modern literary forms, Rshnohi successfully cultivated an internal social immunity among the youth, preparing them to constructively engage with global modernity without losing their unique ethno-religious and cultural identity.

Concurrently, the primary academic purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and source-based historical analysis of the role played by the newspaper Rshnohi within the broader evolution of the Bukharian Jewish enlightenment movement in the early twentieth century. To achieve this overarching objective, the study addresses several interconnected research goals designed to enrich our understanding of Central Asian press history and minority modernization processes. It seeks to delineate the exact socio-political and economic conditions that facilitated the birth of the Judeo-Tajik press, exploring the intricate networks of patronage, publishing logistics, and censorship that shaped its editorial trajectory. It further aims to critically analyze the ideological content and thematic structure of Rshnohi, identifying its primary pedagogical, cultural, and socio-philosophical contributions to the discourse of regional modernity. Crucially, the investigation evaluates the creative cross-cultural interactions between Bukharian Jewish modernists and the contemporary Islamic Jadid movement, demonstrating how shared geographic, linguistic, and socio-historical realities generated parallel strategies for social reform. Finally, the research contextualizes this rich archival heritage within the current academic frameworks of Central Asian history and cultural preservation, presenting the legacy of Rshnohi as a vital component of the pluralistic historical fabric of the region. Ultimately, this expansive introductory analysis aims to demonstrate that Rshnohi was an indispensable, forward-looking blueprint for cultural resilience, proving that a minority community's embrace of media and modern

enlightenment constitutes the ultimate source of its historical agency, social adaptation, and intellectual preservation during eras of profound systemic change.

The history, culture, and ultimate identity of every nation are uniquely mirrored and preserved within its national press, as demonstrated on the soil of Uzbekistan where diverse nationalities and ethnic groups have coexisted in absolute peace and harmony for centuries while dynamically advancing their unique cultural heritages, with the Bukharian Jewish community standing out as one of the most distinctive social groups possessing such a rich historical legacy. Exactly one century ago, in October 1925, the first official newspaper published in the native language of the Bukharian Jews, titled "Rshnohi" (meaning "The Light"), began its historical publication run in the city of Samarkand, operating not merely as a basic medium for everyday news but rather functioning as a monumental beacon of enlightenment aimed at eradicating widespread illiteracy, standardizing the vernacular, and preserving the literary and cultural heritage of an entire community. Through this scientific inquiry, we explore the brief yet remarkably rich history of the "Rshnohi" newspaper, a public organ that triggered a profound social and educational turning point in its era but was subsequently erased from the official pages of history due to the tragic political crackdowns and state-sponsored repressions of the Soviet purge era.

During the mid-1920s, a widespread state campaign was initiated across Central Asia, and specifically within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, to liquidate functional illiteracy and provide national minority populations with systemic education in their native languages, a period during which the Bukharian Jews had already been speaking their distinct Judeo-Tajik language for centuries although they completely lacked a regularly published national newspaper or periodic print journal to anchor their public discourse. This historical vacuum was permanently filled in October 1925 when the first official newspaper in the history of the Bukharian Jewish community, "Rshnohi", successfully emerged in Samarkand, an milestone that was widely celebrated as a massive public triumph and an unforgettable event across the entire community under the organizational and ideological leadership of Khaim Kalontarov, who was an eminent and forward-thinking enlightenment intellectual of that era.

The physical production and typographical printing of the newspaper faced immense structural and technical challenges, primarily because the contemporary printing facilities in Samarkand entirely lacked Hebrew typesets, forcing the resourcefulness of the editorial staff to adopt a highly creative alternative method whereby the entire text of each upcoming edition was meticulously handwritten using professional calligraphy onto sheets of paper or glass templates before being manually duplicated and distributed utilizing the traditional lithographic stone-printing technique. It was only by the year 1927, following the specialized procurement and delivery of authentic Hebrew typographical fonts from Moscow, that the newspaper successfully transitioned to modern typographical printing methods, allowing the editorial columns to be distributed in the local Bukharian-Jewish vernacular, which was printed using the traditional Hebrew alphabet that ordinary citizens were already accustomed to, thereby directly facilitating rapid comprehension and high literacy engagement among the general populace.

During its operational lifespan, "Rshnohi" performed a monumental socio-pedagogical duty in reshaping public consciousness and preparing the community for the socio-economic realities of modern life, evolving far past a standard compilation of information into a genuine hub for public education and social reform. At that time, illiteracy rates were exceptionally high among the

Bukharian Jewish population, which prompted the newspaper to continuously urge citizens to pursue modern education, enroll in the newly established public schools, and attain functional literacy, while its pages regularly featured comprehensive updates regarding school systems, newly designed secular textbooks, and the long-term societal benefits of modern science.

Undoubtedly, one of the newspaper's most significant historical achievements was its progressive stance on the empowerment of women, who had traditionally been confined to domestic labor and remained largely excluded from public life, as "Rshnohi" aggressively championed female education, vocational training, and absolute gender equality in civil rights, a persistent media advocacy that directly catalyzed the emergence of a highly active layer of female leaders within the community, culminating in the historic election of Bukharian Jewish women as deputies to local municipal councils. Furthermore, the newspaper successfully institutionalized a vibrant literary ecosystem, rallying the most talented contemporary writers, poets, and publicists around its editorial board, which allowed many of these authors to publish their foundational poems, short stories, and analytical essays within its pages, thereby laying the structural groundwork for modern Bukharian Jewish literature while concurrently offering consistent coverage of regional theater, performing arts, and new cultural circles.

Over the years, "Rshnohi" underwent significant administrative and structural modifications driven by the changing regional political climate, leading to the relocation of its editorial headquarters from Samarkand to the capital city of Tashkent in 1930, where its name was officially changed to "Bayrog‘i mehnat" (The Banner of Labor) as it transitioned from a weekly publication into a massive, daily distributed national periodical. However, by the late 1930s, the Soviet regime initiated severe institutional restrictions, ideological crackdowns, and structural repressions against minority national cultural institutions, culminating in a definitive 1938 government decree that systematically shut down all Bukharian Jewish schools, national theaters, and printing organs, while the vast majority of the creative intellectuals, journalists, and editors associated with the newspaper were branded as political dissidents, repressed, and exiled to labor camps, forcing the newspaper to terminate its operations permanently.

Although "Rshnohi" and its successor enjoyed a brief operational lifespan, it left an indelible footprint on the history of the Bukharian Jews by serving as a genuine intellectual light that opened public eyes and disseminated knowledge, education, and progressive culture, leaving behind surviving editions that constitute exceptionally rare historical documents demonstrating the rich, pluralistic, and multifaceted cultural heritage of the ethnic communities that have populated the land of Uzbekistan for centuries. In the contemporary era, the historical "Rshnohi" newspaper no longer exists as an independent, active print publication within the region, having been completely dismantled by the Soviet authorities in 1938 without ever being restored domestically, yet its name, core enlightenment ideas, and historical legacy continue to live on through diverse modern transnational manifestations.

During the 1990s, the Bukharian Jewish diaspora that migrated from Central Asia established a prominent public, educational, and scientific organization titled the "Rshnohi" Scientific and Cultural Center in New York City, symbolically adopting the name of the historic newspaper as their organizational brand to ensure its legacy remains unforgotten, and while they do not publish a standalone newspaper under that name today, the center regularly compiles, edits, and publishes scientific monographs, historical volumes, and journals documenting the language, history, and

Central Asian heritage of the Bukharian Jews. Concurrently, the primary contemporary successors and largest continuators of this historical press tradition are published abroad, exemplified by The Bukharian Times in New York, which operates as the premier weekly Bukharian Jewish newspaper globally, publishing in Russian, English, and the Bukhari language while regularly serving as an academic repository for archival materials regarding the original "Rshnohi", alongside the Bukharskaya Gazeta in Israel, which is issued by the local diaspora as a monthly analytical and cultural journal.

Furthermore, this cultural continuity is reinforced by modern digital archives, as original extant copies of "Rshnohi" spanning the years 1925 to 1930 have been meticulously digitized by the National Library of Israel and various research institutes in the United States, allowing global historians, linguists, and university students to actively utilize these electronic resources as a primary historical source for Central Asian studies. In conclusion, the term "Rshnohi" encapsulates two distinct yet organically intertwined socio-cultural phenomena spanning the past century, wherein its past manifestation from 1925 to 1938 represented the foundational, pioneering newspaper published in the native language of the Bukharian Jews within Uzbekistan that acted as a monumental engine of literacy, a fierce defender of women's civil rights, and the cradle of modern national literature before being tragically terminated by political repressions, while its present manifestation in the twenty-first century continues to live on dynamically through transnational scientific-cultural centers, archival digitization projects, and modern community publications. Ultimately, "Rshnohi" transcends the definition of a mere historical press publication, standing as an enduring intellectual bridge and a living monument of historical memory that ensures the rich past, distinct language, and sophisticated culture of the Bukharian Jews of Central Asia are permanently preserved for future generations.

In conclusion, a systematic social-philosophical and historical assessment of the pioneering Judeo-Tajik newspaper Rshnohi (later Bayrog‘i mehnat) reveals that its publication between 1925 and 1938 marked an epochal milestone in the enlightenment movement, educational modernization, and cultural preservation of the Bukharian Jewish community within the broader pluralistic landscape of Central Asia, serving as an irreplaceable public sphere that bridged traditional ethno-religious identity with modern civic responsibility. By courageously navigating profound technical limitations-such as the initial absence of Hebrew typesets in Samarkand printing houses which necessitated the ingenious use of lithographic calligraphy-and by aggressively championing transformative social reforms, most notably the eradication of systemic illiteracy, the standardization of the local vernacular, the institutionalization of modern secular curricula, and the unprecedented socio-political empowerment of women, the newspaper successfully generated a powerful internal social immunity that prepared its readers to engage with twentieth-century modernities without sacrificing their rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Although the tragic ideological repressions of 1938 prematurely and violently dismantled this flourishing media organ and exiled its creative intelligentsia, the historical legacy of Rshnohi has transcended its physical termination, dynamically surviving in the twenty-first century through digitized international archives at the National Library of Israel, transnational scholarly institutions, and contemporary diaspora publications like The Bukharian Times in New York. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that Rshnohi was never a mere regional news periodical, but rather a vital civilizational bridge and an enduring symbol of enlightenment against ignorance, illustrating how the historic print media of Central Asia continues to function as a living testament to the multi-ethnic, tolerant, and diverse cultural heritage that defines the historical consciousness of Uzbekistan.

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