

Features of the Ismaili community of the Pamirs

Khubonshoev Sheroz Jobirshoevich

Translator

IAAS of the Lomonosov Moscow State University

Abstract. This article is devoted to the formation of the Ismaili community in the Pamirs. It is noted that representatives of various confessions moved to the territory of the Pamirs in the course of the historical process. The importance of interaction of the Ismailis of Tajikistan with the Ismaili communities of neighboring Afghanistan is emphasized. Attention is drawn to the fact that it is necessary to rely on historical experience to resolve the current acute problems in the Central Asian region.

Keywords: Pamir, Central Asia, Ismailis, community, beliefs.

Currently, the Ismailis make up 80% of the population of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan [1. p. 74]. Their place of residence is a significant part of Afghan Badakhshan, such districts as Shugnan, Wakhan, Zebak, Yumgan, Jurm, Rushan, Kiran-Munjan and Darvaz. [11. p. 24]. At the moment, the Pamir is the only place where the Ismailis live compactly, and Tajikistan is the only country where the Ismailis make up the majority in the largest administrative entity. [12. p. 14]. The history of the development of Ismailism in the Pamirs is full of significant and turning events, as a result of which the unique characteristics of the Pamir community were formed, which differed in many respects from the inhabitants of the valley. [8. p. 91].

It should be noted that for a long time, up to the XI century, representatives of various faiths found shelter in the Pamirs: pagan, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist [3. p. 102]. The Pamir adjoins Central Asia through which the Silk Road passed and, accordingly, trade, as well as the interaction of cultures. In connection with the

events taking place today, it is worth remembering that "the destinies of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the origins of the relationship of which originate in the depths of the centuries, are closely intertwined to this day". And, in this regard, the experience of the historical development of Afghanistan, both positive and negative, is very important for the peoples of Central Asia, which consists in avoiding its fate and not becoming an arena of military confrontation and a clash of external forces with all the ensuing consequences... [9. p. 2083].

At the same time, the Pamir is the "roof of the world" where representatives of religious minorities who are hiding from persecution have found refuge. So, as a result, in the Middle Ages, more than 15 ethno-linguistic groups lived in the Pamirs, for whose interethnic communication Farsi was. The spread of Ismailism in the Pamirs began, in all likelihood, at the turn of the X-XI centuries and is mainly associated with Ismaili preachers called "**dai**". The main function of the dai was to explain the ideas of Ismailism to the local population. : during the reign of Emir Nasr II Samanid (914-943), the Ismailis achieved a prominent position at the court [7. p. 92].

Modern Ismailis associate the origin of Ismailism in the Pamirs with the name of the famous philosopher, scientist and writer Nasir Khusraw (1004-1070). In scientific circles, this belief is supported, although there is precise evidence that it is Nasir Khusraw who is considered the founder of the Ismaili tradition in Badakhshan, [6. p. 181.]. And today there are legends where his personality is given sacred meaning. So, until 1995, the main prayer of the Pamir Ismailis was called "Pir-i-Sho" (literally "Lord of the Lords") [7. p. 29]. Its authorship is attributed to Nasir Khusraw, and his name is mentioned along with the Imam. Significant geographical objects were also named after Nasir Khusrav, for example, the springs "Piri Shonosir Chakhma" (Shonosir - Shah Nasir). Stories about Nasir Khusraw are passed down from generation to generation, and in different villages his biography is supplemented with various myths and details [3. p. 5]. Much has survived from Nasir Khusraw in the traditional ritual of the Ismailis, for example, the traditional recitation of sacred verses in the house of one

of the community members - "Maddohoni". The Pamir Ismailis maintained political autonomy until the XIX century. By 1841, the largest concentration of Ismailis around the world was in these areas: between the Hindu Kush and Pamir ranges. In the Tajik Pamir alone, by the beginning of the XX century, more than 14 thousand Ismailis lived in 97 villages [8. p. 91.].

From the second half of the XIX century, the Sunnis began to expand into the Pamirs, and two world powers appeared on the political arena: the British and Russian empires. In the 1890s, Russia occupied the Pamirs up to the Hindu Kush Range, and the possessions of the British crown expanded north of India. Both powers were interested in the Pamirs, as it is a strategic region bordering the key Asian civilizations of India, Western Asia (Iran and the Arab countries) and China, and is the intersection of trade and military routes. The "Great Game", which continued in the Pamirs during the entire second half of the XIX century, was formally completed with the signing in 1895 of the Treaty on the Division of Spheres of Influence in the Pamirs. The border between Russia and Afghanistan, which was in the sphere of interests of England, was the Panj River: the territories on the right bank retreated to Russia, and the lands on the left side became part of Afghanistan. From the point of view of political boundaries, the division according to a natural geographic feature (river or mountain ridge) seems to be strategically convenient. When dividing the Pamirs, however, the ethnocultural features of the region were completely ignored, since after the creation of state borders, such territories as Wakhan, Ishkashim, Goron, Shugnan and Roshan were literally "split" in half.

The Pyanj River did not become an obstacle for the Pamiris. Many families, having a house and arable land on the right bank, drove their livestock to the left. In addition, mutual trade operations took place jointly on one or the other side. The division into two states immediately affected the community: firstly, agriculture was hit; secondly, the formal closure of the border gave rise to and flourishing of smuggling and illegal trade operations, which continue to this day, and on a frightening scale [3. p. 14]. The illegal nature of trade exchanges in the

Pamirs inevitably led to a sharp jump in prices even for essential goods, traditionally purchased from one side and the other: salt, rice, metals for the manufacture of agricultural products and dishes [13. p. 81]. All products bought by the Pamiris became difficult to access, since the Russian-Afghan border was officially considered closed. Here it is worth mentioning that trade contacts, although in a closed form, continued to be carried out: Russian and Afghan border guards in most cases ignored the facts of illegal border crossing for the purpose of peaceful trade [5. p. 76]. Yet, despite the partial preservation of trade and cultural ties, in 1895 the Ismailis of the Pamirs, representing a single ethno-confessional space, were divided into two different administrative units. The first became part of the Russian Empire, then Tajikistan, the other became part of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Ismailis of Tajikistan and Afghanistan continued to live side by side with each other, and the unity of historical destinies runs through the entire XX century.

The annexation of the territories on the right hand of Pyanj to the Russian Empire, despite the obvious negative aspects described above, still had certain positive consequences. Russia, taking the Pamir Ismailis under direct subordination, freed them from the oppression of the Sunni rulers of Bukhara and Afghanistan, who were constantly replacing each other [2. p. 82]. In 1905, the Pamir was removed from the general Turkestan rule and became a separate district, which was henceforth directly subordinate to the head of the Pamir detachment. The Ismailis were able to freely send zakat (religious tax) to Imam Aga Khan III in Bombay. In addition, the Russian authorities, given the strategic importance of the region, invested large sums in the development of the region's infrastructure, building and erecting roads and canals, the largest of which was the Pamir Highway, which still plays the role of the main transport artery of the Pamirs [14. p. 78].

The October Revolution and the coming of the Bolsheviks to power initially did not affect Badakhshan in any way. Having established Soviet power in Tajikistan, the local branches of the AUCP(b) party proclaimed freedom of

religion in the Pamirs: "The beliefs and customs of Muslims, their national and cultural institutions are inviolable. Their rights are free and unhindered to build their lives". [6. p. 32]. Perhaps the freedom given to the Ismailis was due to the fact that the first leaders of Soviet Tajikistan were immigrants from the Pamirs. Another possible reason is the political loyalty of the Pamiris to the Russian government. Thus, the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic declared in 1922 that the Ismailis "gravitate toward the Russians," and there is no need to talk about the danger of the separatist activities of the Badakhshans [11. p. 33.]. Having come to power in the Pamirs, the Soviet leadership, first of all, sought to solve the socio-economic problems of the region: the growing population faced the problem of land shortages: out of 57,000 sq. km. territories of only 9000 hectares were suitable for agriculture, and for the 40-thousand population of Gorno-Badakhshan this was extremely small [4. p. 11-13.]. The Pamirs became one of the subsidized regions, which further burdened the country's budget during the period of reconstruction after the Civil War. In 1930, the Union of Militant Atheists was created, the purpose of which was to discredit Ismailism as a religion: "The customs and beliefs propagated by the leaders of Ismailism fully coincided with the predatory measures that were carried out in the economic and political spheres by the tsarism and exploiters in Tajikistan before the revolution" [11. p. 63.] This kind of propaganda statements did not give results, and the statistical successes of the Union of Atheists, which eloquently indicated that every fourth Pamiri is an active member of the organization, do not inspire confidence.

The struggle against religious leaders was conducted more actively and successfully: in 1928 alone, 554 religious leaders were deprived of their civil rights, in 1929 331 people were added to the list, and in the period 1936-1940 another 509 people were subjected to repression. The most frequent accusation was espionage for the British imperialists, who were fully supported by the Aga Khan III [4. p. 75.] An atmosphere of fear reigned in the Pamirs, and eyewitnesses of those events point to the general atmosphere in the Pamirs at that time. One of the

Pamir elders recalls: "[My father] ordered that the family bake cakes for him every day, and he slept dressed and shod: he was afraid of a sudden arrest". [7. p. 75].

Despite harsh government measures and the physical annihilation of religious authority figures and clerics, Ismaili ties with the Aga Khan continued. The turning point was 1936, when, in order to preserve state security, a decision was made to completely close the Soviet-Afghan border. From that moment, the ties of the Tajik Ismailis with the imam were actually interrupted. Work on anti-religious propaganda did not stop in the 50s and 60s, when any inscription on the Arabic script was the reason for accusations of espionage against the state.

The Soviet period in the Tajik part of the Pamir remained difficult. On the one hand, foreign researchers note the successes achieved by the Soviet leadership in the Pamirs: the population of Badakhshan quadrupled and by 1991 reached 200000 people, hundreds of educational and cultural institutions were commissioned and opened in the Pamirs [13. p. 74]. However, the efforts made by the Soviet leadership aimed at the development of agriculture, energy and industry in GBAR were still not able to fully meet the internal needs of the region, about 80% of food was imported from other republics of the USSR. Many infrastructure projects were never implemented, for example, the project of the "Kulyab-Nulvand-Kalai-Khumb" highway, which allows year-round communication between Dushanbe and Khorog, was never implemented.

The situation is even more difficult for the Ismaili community in Afghanistan. Officially recognized as part of Afghan territory, the local community has come under pressure from the Sunni majority. The uprising of the Afghan Ismailis of 1925 against the arbitrariness of the Afghan government failed. The rebels who fled to the Tajik SSR were extradited to Kabul and severely punished [14. p. 78]. at present, "after the activation of the Taliban movement (banned in Russia), it is worth paying close attention to this region again" [9.2083.].

Thus, at the turn of the century, the Ismailis of the Pamirs found themselves in a difficult situation: in Tajikistan, communities were oppressed by the atheistic Soviet government. In addition, economic problems in the region were growing

and the infrastructure of the region was left far behind a century ago. On the other hand, the disgraced position of the Ismailis in the Pamirs played a cementing role in their self-awareness and self-identification: most Ismailis remained true to their faith, and the Ismaili communities themselves continued to function, despite severe restrictions.

References

1. Baranov P.A. Introduction of agriculture in the high-mountainous zones of the Pamirs and raising its productivity in the Western Pamirs. – L., 1936.
2. Bobrinskaya A.A. Highlanders of the upper reaches of the Pyanj (Vakhans and Ishkashims). – M., 1908.
3. Bobrinsky A.A. Secta Ismailia. – M., 1902.
4. State Archives of GBAR, 38 pages, № 131 // Pamir expedition. – M., 2006.
5. Karamshoev D., Kharkavchuk I. Border guards and residents of the Pamirs. – Dushanbe, 1995.
6. Kalandarov, T. S. Ismailism in the Pamirs: Search for New Ways and Solutions. – M., 2006.
7. Kalandarov T.S. Religion in the life of the Pamirs in the XX century / Pamir expedition. – M., 2006.
8. Plekhanov S. An open palm. – M., 2006.
9. Syzdykova Zh.S. Peoples and ethnic groups of Afghanistan and Central Asia in a historical context // Issues of national and federal relations. Issue 7 (76), 2021.
10. Usmonov M.A. Ismailism in Afghanistan. – Dushanbe.
11. Khodzhibekov, E. Kh. Essays on the history of Badakhshan. – Dushanbe, 2013.
12. Khudoyorov M.M. Ismailism in the post-Soviet Pamirs // Bulletin of RUDN. Series "General History". – №2. – M., 2010.
13. Shokhumorov A. Separation of Badakhshan and the fate of Ismailism / ex. ed. N. M. Emelyanova. – M.: IOS RAS; Dushanbe: IV ANT, 2008.
14. Elnazarov H., Aksakolov S. Ismailis-Nizari of Central Asia in Modern Times // Contemporary History of the Ismailis, 2013.