

Islam in Tajikistan: Tradition and Modernity

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Men pray to different prophets
Men do evil and good things
Their actions are as alike as the twigs
For the fire on which they will burn.

(Sheikh Abdurrakhman Jami, fifteenth century)

Tradition

Islam began to penetrate the territory which is modern-day Tajikistan quite early on – in the second half of the seventh century.¹ Towards the end of the eighth century the dynamic new religion of the Arabs was already becoming established among a significant proportion of the population in the area between rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya. In the tenth century Islam became the state religion of the Samanid Empire, which Tajik historians generally regard as the first formation of the Tajik people into a state.² The entrance of the Tajiks into the young, lively Islamic world was accompanied by the advent of high culture, flourishing scholarship and the growth of the economy.

This Central Asian territory between two rivers on the periphery of the Islamic world saw the development of a unique Islamic sub-civilisation which combined the monotheistic tradition of Abraham with elements of ancient beliefs primarily linked with a settled, agricultural way of life. Having amassed its own potential, the Islamic intellect of the region gradually began in turn to enrich the cultural life of Muslims in southern Asia and the Middle and Near East.

Philosophical, social and moral thought reached unprecedented heights in Central Asia between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. This intellectual ferment came about under the influence of Sufism, which to a certain extent had distanced itself from the strict orthodoxy of scribes and lawmakers. The Sufis brought a fresh wave of spirituality into the Islamic tradition. The moral and social values which they formulated permeate the whole of classical Tajik–Persian literature, which can rightly be regarded as the quintessence of Central Asian Islam. Nowadays the Tajik peasant, mullah, engineer or academic tries as a rule to support his arguments when discussing belief with the poetry of Jami, Saadi, Khafiz, Rumi, Rudaki and other sages who brought together in their work the elevated philosophy of the unity of the universe, the folk epic and fundamental morality. The Quran and Sunna were undoubtedly their main inspiration. Modern Tajik proverbs, sayings and parables are full of Quranic and early Islamic motifs handed down through medieval poetry.

At the basis of Islamic moral ideals is the socio-political doctrine of the Naqshbandi,³ which is widespread among Tajik Sufis. It is better known locally under the name *Khojagon*.⁴ Condemning the asceticism of earlier mystic brotherhoods, the Naqshbandi called upon fellow Muslims not to turn their back on worldly problems and upon their spiritual leaders to move close to thrones and exert all their influence on ruling powers to prevent despotic rule over merchants, manufacturers and the peasantry. With this as their aim, Khojagon sheiks became mentors to sovereigns, attempting to implant in their souls the seeds of fear of God, kindness and nobility of character. They sometimes put quite heavy pressure on those who were excessively tyrannical, wilful and harsh in their treatment of their subjects.

This doctrine was particularly clearly manifest in the activities of the Naqshbandi Sheikh Khoji Akhror, who by means of conviction and heavy pressure on rulers great and small succeeded in easing the lives of simple folk by preventing destructive raids and bloody civil wars. The achievement of justice within the state was associated first and foremost with the necessity of implementing the commands of *sharia* law in the very system of power. In the apt words of the Sufi poet and philosopher Sheikh Abdurrahman Jami, Khoji Akhror 'made sharia law and beliefs a yoke for all sultans' necks'.⁵ Jami himself, indisputably a Khojagon authority, put justice above formal worship. This idea – entirely seditious in those days – appears in his poem *Salaman and Absal*:

A just king, even if he does not read the Quran,
Is nobler than a devout tyrant.
Not by faith, nor by customs is a country strong
But by the law of justice.⁶

In the eyes of the Naqshbandi, who measured norms of social relations by the *Khanifit mazkhab* (one of the four main law schools in the Islamic juridical system), truth and sharia law were not hard and fast dogmas. Sufi leaders, including Khoji Akhror, called upon those in power 'to use the sharia law in accordance with the spirit of the age'.⁷ In this way a considerable range of possibilities for political reform and the regulation of economic relations were opened up.

The principal aim of just rule was considered to be the maintenance of a quiet and peaceful life for the workers, most of whom were peasants. In the Naqshbandi tradition agricultural work is holy and the oppression of the peasantry is sacrilegious in that it undermines the basis of the state. Indeed, the entire history of this Central Asian river valley region testifies to the fact that when villages grow poor, towns empty and palaces fall into ruin.

In the fifteenth century the Naqshbandi teachers placed greater value on protection of the unfortunate, promotion of the interests of the majority and service of the people than on mystical practices. At that time the tradition of intervention in politics by the spiritual authorities finally became established under Khoji Akhror. This involvement took the form of correcting the action of secular leaders, but stopped short of replacing their power with that of the clergy. This idiosyncrasy of the Central Asian religio-political tradition is important for an understanding of the Islamic movement in Tajikistan today, especially since the Tajik mullahs themselves emphasise the fact that the Islam of the region is predominantly of the Naqshbandi type.

In Tajikistan today (population 5.5 million) no fewer than 95 per cent of believers are Muslims, and 93 per cent of Muslims (some 5 million people) are Sunnis of the *Khanifit mazkhab*. The remainder (some 350,000) are Ismailis, who belong to one of

the branches of Shiism. The latter are mostly from the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous *Oblast'* (GBAO). Their Islam is very eclectic; they give more importance to esoteric knowledge and spiritual self-perfection than to formal rites and do not observe rituals which are compulsory for Sunnis. In the settlement of Andarbak in the Yazgulem valley in the GBAO there is a small community of Isnaasharia (Twelver Shiites) who belong to the most widespread and moderate branch of Shiism.

As well as official Islam, so-called folk Islam is widespread within local culture. For centuries Arabic Islamic tradition has been adapting itself to local beliefs; and it has absorbed the customs of the peoples of Central Asia. In all parts of Tajikistan pre-Islamic rites have been preserved; for example, worship of saints and sacred objects and a belief in magic and miracles.⁸ The ancient agricultural rites and festivals of the Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian period are widespread amongst Sunnis and Ismailis alike; these are primarily linked with the worship of nature and the cults of fertility, fire, water and earth. The mythical figure of Grandfather Ploughman (Bobo-i Dekhon or Khoja Dekhon) is particularly revered everywhere; according to traditional Muslim genealogy their line descends from Adam. Villagers carefully preserve *risolya* – genealogical lists of the names of holy 'Khoja Dekhons'.⁹

Before Soviet rule was established in Tajikistan each town and village had its own sacred places – the burial-vaults of devout spiritual leaders, sacred stones, trees, reservoirs. Places where famous Sufis had stayed for a time were also considered holy. Tajiks called them '*kadamja*' – 'places where the foot of a holy one has stepped'. These could be picturesque groves, majestic waterfalls, striking cliffs, springs or caves. From the mid-1920s onwards the inhabitants of tens of thousands of tiny villages were transferred to larger settlements and towns; but the people maintained their spiritual connection with their small homeland, with the holy sites of their ancestors. A reverent attitude towards holy *mazars*¹⁰ continues for another reason too: some Muslims, in the Garm group of regions and in Darvaz, for example, observe the custom of consecrating the new-born in the burial-vault of a local saint, who according to folk belief then becomes the baby's invisible life-time protector.¹¹

For various ethnic and cultural groups in Tajikistan the most revered Sufi burial vaults have gradually become objects of special veneration. Thus Muslims in Kulyab regard Sheikh Amir Said Khamadoni (fourteenth century) as their guardian and Muslims of the Leninabad *oblast'* regard Sheikh Muslikhiddin (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) as theirs. The inhabitants of the Gissar valley revere the burial vault of Mavlono Yakubi Charkhi (fifteenth century), while those of the Yavan valley revere that of Domullo Kilichali (eighteenth century).¹²

As recently as 60 to 70 years ago particular family groups, and sometimes even whole settlements and regions, would regard themselves as *murid* (followers) of a particular *ishan* (a Sufi spiritual leader) or of a whole family of ishans. Ishans, otherwise known as *pir* (pious elders), generally came from the revered families of *Seyyid* or *Khoja*, whose genealogies go back to the families of the prophet Muhammed, of his closest associates or of renowned Sufis.¹³ Elders in Tajikistan say that up until the revolution it was rare to meet a person who did not have a *pir*; in the eyes of simple folk anyone who did not would be considered to have lapsed from the faith. It is noteworthy that when elderly people are recalling the names of tribes and ancestors in their family tree they often mention that they were *murids* of one or another family of ishans. The last few decades have of course fundamentally altered traditional relationships; but even today Muslims from the most varied social groups still observe customs of religious class subordination, although certainly not as

strictly as before. One indicator of a particularly respectful attitude towards Sufi leaders is the fact that most of the Tajik leadership since the start of *perestroika* has been chosen from renowned ishan families.¹⁴

On the whole, the Naqshbandi Islam in Central Asia has reconciled sharia law with pre-Islamic beliefs and customs. This mixture of learned and folk Islam is so moderate, so distant from radicalism and so much in accord with the spiritual mood of the most varied sections of Islamic society that it has shown significant tenacity in the new conditions of harsh modernisation of society.

In Soviet Tajikistan the 'struggle against the survival of religion' did not inflict serious damage on the Islamic tradition. Islamic customs were not observed at work, but they were followed at home. Officially religious schools did not exist, but in fact local experts on the Quran and Islamic customs often taught children the fundamentals of religion and traditional morals. Some were taught by their fathers and grandfathers. Documents produced by atheist departments give the number of mosques as just a few dozen, whereas in fact there were hundreds. Believers gathered for religious conversation and prayer in one another's homes, tea-houses, clubs and 'red corners' (recreational rooms in Soviet factories), where prayers would often be said before portraits of the classical thinkers of Marxism–Leninism. The pearls of Sufi literature, works thoroughly permeated with religious philosophy, were published and republished for decades; with superb commentaries on Sufi symbolism by orientalists, they were inexhaustible sources of wisdom. The 'atheist struggle' usually consisted in attempts to eliminate the cult of saints, magic rituals and lavish expenditure on Islamic festivals. These were the usual targets of local atheists. Clergy were generally criticised as greedy and semiliterate, but intellectual disputes on the teachings of the Quran were hardly ever organised. In the late 1980s, for example, there were reports from atheist departments about amulets confiscated from Muslims which were meant to demonstrate the effectiveness of the struggle against religious relics. Paradoxical as it may seem, the activity of Central Asian atheists in many ways recalled that of puritanical foreign Muslims and of the few local groups which were in favour of purifying the faith and putting an end to eclectic folk Islam.

'Learned' Islam was preserved by the local intelligentsia, particularly those in the humanities. They began to fulfil many of the functions of the traditional class of the *ulama* (highly-educated theologians). Within the walls of academic institutes of philosophy, history, literature, oriental studies and eastern manuscripts, medieval Islamic texts were collected and studied, and sound works on Islamic history and philosophy were produced. The obligatory atheistic formulae they contained did not affect the scientific significance of these works; they were a formality and were not taken seriously. Thorough research was carried out, mainly on Sufism and Ismailism. Academic specialists frequently outshone mullahs and ishans in their knowledge of Arabic, medieval sources and the classical Islamic sciences; some of them, indeed, were from respected *ulama* families themselves. It is significant that much of the social programme of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan was worked out by academics who had a head start in the intensive study of the works of contemporary Islamic socio-political thinkers and the experience of islamicisation in Arab countries, Pakistan and Iran. At the end of the 1980s it was these humanities institutes which concentrated intellectual study on the subject of the national renaissance, which naturally included the religious renaissance too. There was indeed a price to be paid for free thinking: the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Tajikistan Academy of Sciences was closed down.

The official Islamic clergy, though small in numbers, received sound theological

training at the Bukhara *madrassah* 'Mir-i Arab', at the Tashkent Islamic Institute and at universities in the Arab countries. Highly-educated members of the Islamic clergy would always have a few pupils. They were able to pass on the religious knowledge they had accumulated regardless of whether they were serving in official mosques or not. The so-called self-taught mullahs, who were hungry to perfect their knowledge, would travel to visit the famous religious leaders of Uzbekistan, mainly in the Fergana Valley, most often in Andijan, but also in Termez, where the outstanding educational traditions of the most famous Muslim university in India (at Deoband) were maintained illegally by several members of the ulama from local Seyyid families who had completed their religious training under renowned Deoband teachers at the beginning of the century.

Towards the end of the 1980s there were more than 1500 unofficial mullahs in Tajikistan. They did not constitute an organisation, and most of them kept out of politics. They chiefly concentrated on preserving tradition, organising and registering local communities and collecting funds for building mosques. By 1988 there were 17 official mosques in the country but thousands of unofficial ones.

It was natural that as soon as the authorities relaxed religious persecution there was a rapid renaissance of Islamic institutions. By the end of 1991 130 Friday mosques were already functioning in Tajikistan as well as 2800 smaller mosques and prayer houses and 150 Quranic schools. Of the 120 Islamic worshipping communities which had been registered, 50 were so-called 'pure Islam' communities which follow traditional religious practices with particular zeal. Most of the clergy in the new mosques (95 per cent) are from the ranks of former unofficial clergy.¹⁵

A natural religious renaissance has thus taken place; but Central Asian Islam has remained untouched by the spectre of currents of ideological reform, long established elsewhere in the East. The natural process of reform which had been gathering strength at the start of the twentieth century had been interrupted. Furthermore, during the years of Soviet power there had been a process of compulsory reform; this was non-intellectual and was not the result of processes coming to fruition within Islam. Elsewhere – in Iran, Turkey, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan – Islamic social thought had been developing for decades, digesting the experience of both West and East, but in Central Asia Muslims were primarily concerned with preserving the basic features of a traditionally-developed religious system, while the state took over wholesale concern for social problems. What belonged to Caesar was given to Caesar, what was God's was given to God. Muslims were involved with Islam; politics and ideology were removed from the confessional and national spheres.

It is not surprising, then, that in the *perestroika* and post-*perestroika* years Central Asia did not produce any prominent Islamic social thinkers such as Abul Kalam Azad, Jamaluddin al-Afgani, Ali Shariati, Seiid Khussein Nasr, Abul Ala Maududi and Said Ahmad Khan. As far as we know, not one serious theoretical work about the possible structure of an Islamic state was written in Central Asia at this time.

Intellectual activity was proceeding in a different direction. In the early 1990s a large number of works on the history, philosophy, literature and ethics of Islam and popular studies of the Quran and Hadiths (traditional stories about Muhammed's deeds and sayings) appeared in Tajikistan. Most of their authors were academics – philosophers, philologists, historians. Islamic clergy were more involved in publishing sacred texts and handbooks on Islamic ritual. The process of the Islamic renaissance was reflected in the legalisation of religious institutions, and in a general interest in the Islamic spiritual heritage and educational activity. For a long time religious education was the main concern even among those Islamic non-conformists

who today comprise the politically-engaged leadership of the opposition Tajik Islamic Revival Movement (TIRM).¹⁶ Everyone was working in his own way to promote the revival of religious life. There have never been any disputes on strictly theological questions amongst these groups; schisms have occurred chiefly as a result of political affiliation and regional allegiances. Tajik Islamic thought has thus not formulated many clear ideas about a desired state structure and social order.

The usual approach is to categorise contemporary Islamic socio-political tendencies as traditionalist, fundamentalist or modernist, but this is not applicable to the current Islamic movement in Tajikistan.¹⁷ This methodological model works elsewhere in the Islamic world but does not suit the Central Asian situation. Islamic tendencies in this region, including Tajikistan, can be divided more readily into moderate traditionalist (chiefly apolitical) and radical neotraditionalist (chiefly politicised). The fundamental question for spiritual leaders in the republic remains that of whether to become involved in politics.

The Industrial Onslaught – the Islamic Response

The politicised Islamic movement in Tajikistan, which gathered strength at the end of the 1980s, was first and foremost the response of a traditional society to the rapid process of industrialisation which was devastating because it was accompanied by violence against the dominant peasant culture.¹⁸

This violence was felt particularly by the inhabitants of the mountainous south-eastern regions of the country: from the 1920s onwards they were resettled *en masse* on the parched steppe in order to cultivate cotton. Subsequent decades saw increasing efforts to create a broad local proletarian class. The prevalent theory was that the development of small-scale peasant production in mountainous territories had no prospects. The industrialisation of manufacturing and agriculture, with the priority of developing cotton production, destroyed economic structures which had lasted for centuries. Hundreds of thousands of peasants and craftsmen were forced to break with their accustomed way of life and adapt to another, more or less alien, cultural environment. Many did not endure the harsh change in climate, the unfamiliar exhausting work and constant chemical poisoning on the cotton fields. Those who were unable to learn new skills, find work or settle into the new places tried to return to their original homelands, but subsequent campaigns to resettle the mountain folk repeatedly thrust them back into the valleys. The state's migration policy, which had as its aim the transformation of traditional peasants and craftsmen into an advanced industrial and agricultural proletariat, was conducted on an astounding scale. Until the mid-1920s 70 per cent of the native population lived in the mountains and foothills; by the early 1990s the figure was down to 30 per cent. In this mountainous republic lowlands account for just 7 per cent of the territory, however. Population movements have thus posed a problem for the 1980s and 1990s.

The policy of relocating populations in the Soviet Union was a symptom of gigantomania. Its aim was to increase the size of cities and large settlements and to merge small collective farms. Naturally, human pressure on the environment from cities and valley settlements grew rapidly as population density in the valleys began to exceed all norms.¹⁹ Traditionally resistant to moving into cities, the population tried to avoid working in large concerns, with the partial exception of the textile and food industries. A huge class of unemployed workers grew up not only in the towns but also in rural areas. Moreover, an acute shortage of water resources was becoming evident by the late 1980s, as a result of irrational and wasteful utilisation.

With the restriction on land resources came a reduction in the area of irrigated ploughed land per inhabitant. In 1925 it was 0.5 hectares; by the early 1990s it was 0.1 hectares. This reduction was a result not only of rapid population growth but also of civil and industrial construction in rural areas and the degradation of the land that had been taken over. As a result of irrational utilisation and the destruction of agricultural technology over half the 570,000 hectares of cultivated land is in an unsatisfactory condition at the present time.

For the past fifteen years the use of water has more than doubled, while the disposal of untreated industrial and commercial waste has also grown. The quality of drinking water has markedly deteriorated. Twice or three times the planned amount of water has been used on the vast cotton plantations.

The proportion of agricultural land that is used for cotton has been increased to 50 per cent. The expansion of cotton land at the expense of arable land has led to a monoculture which is unstable both economically and agronomically. Cotton has replaced normal crop rotation in the fields and has weakened the sound basis of traditional agriculture. Gigantomania in industrialisation has done enormous harm to the ecosystem. Without regard for the natural climatic particularities of Tajikistan the go-ahead was given in the 1960s to the development of huge metallurgical, chemical and engineering works. These quickly began to pollute the air, water and soil. The extreme hazard these plants posed to the particular environment of Tajikistan was not taken into account: this area is in fact the one with the lowest potential for atmospheric self-regeneration within the territory of the former Soviet Union, and its arid soils and small mountain rivers also have a low recovery capacity.

The reorientation of the republic around huge, energy-gobbling industries went hand in hand with the introduction of huge hydroelectric power stations to serve them. In the flood zones thousands of hectares of scarce fertile land disappeared under the reservoirs of gigantic hydroelectric plants and large numbers of peasant families were resettled from mountain ravines to cotton-growing valleys.

Meanwhile the population was increasing rapidly, by 3.5 per cent a year on average, and in certain regions by up to 4.2 per cent. The pace of economic growth lagged behind that of the population. As a result, at the beginning of the 1990s, according to basic socio-economic indicators, Tajikistan was performing worse than any other Soviet republic.²⁰

This soulless revolutionary modernisation made the life of the peasantry especially hard. The people's spiritual and economic lives, which had been in harmony with nature for centuries, were disrupted. Unique local socio-ecological systems were endangered and seriously damaged. Simply by working human beings were now violating the rules of interaction with their environment.

Economic indicators show that on the eve of 'independence' the process of rapid industrialisation in Tajikistan had ended in collapse. Gigantic projects, planned but uncompleted, hovered like mirages. 'Progress' has ended in a cul-de-sac of conflicts. That 'progress' which the industrially-minded elite understood in their idiosyncratic way has run into a wall: the wall of 'tradition' which has been reasserted in recent years. However much society was modernised, Islamic peasant-artisan culture preserved a significant niche in it. During the years of Soviet power the main preserve of such culture remained the Garm region in the south-east of the country in the foothills of the Pamirs (Pripamir'ye). Until recently harmony between society, the individual human soul and nature prevailed here. The destructive monoculture of cotton did not penetrate the region. Thanks to plentiful water and a mild climate, the population of these mountain ravines and valleys had traditionally specialised in the

cultivation of fruit, vegetables and grain. Herds of cattle graze on wide pastures. Garm has provided a significant proportion of the agricultural produce of Tajikistan. High yields have meant that poverty is almost non-existent. Trade in goods has flourished.

The mullahs and ishans here have become renowned for their knowledge of Islamic sciences and the population is notable for its piety. More than 95 per cent of Garm Tajiks are peasants or craftsmen. Communal and patriarchal ties are strong. Traditional morals – *adab* – are honoured. It was no accident that in the 1980s the crime rate in this region was the lowest in the republic.

However, the advance of industrialisation left its destructive trail even here. The construction of the largest hydroelectric power station in the republic began in this mountain district in the valley of Rogun on the River Vakhsh.²¹ More and more electricity was required to transport water to the cotton fields and for the new industrial concerns. Dozens of villages were located where the reservoir of the new power station would be. Towards the end of the 1980s it was decided to move the inhabitants to the steppe that had been colonised by cotton, but there was stubborn resistance on the part of the peasants. They refused to abandon the land they had cherished for centuries and their revered mazars and holy places. The memory of the forced resettlement of thousands of their countrymen was still alive. A breeze of change was already blowing softly through the Soviet Union and people began to voice their protests openly. At the same time discontent with the living conditions was intensifying amongst the *mukhajir*, the mountain dwellers who had been transferred to the valleys.

The protest of the rural masses was headed by young unofficial religious leaders, many of whom had suffered separation from their native region. The majority of them came from mukhajir families. The opposition movement of the Tajiks of the Pripamir'ye naturally and inevitably assumed religious overtones. In spring 1992, as the authorities continued to ignore the interests of a desperate peasantry, authoritative ishans from the south-east of the country rose to their defence. The Naqshbandi tradition of intervention on behalf of landworkers and craftsmen was reborn.

Thousands of murids poured into opposition meetings in the capital in support of politicised Islamic nonconformists. Antigovernment demonstrations were co-ordinated by the leaders of the Tajik Islamic Revival Party (TIRP) and the republican kaziате. On the revolutionary wave rolling from Moscow and in response to the harsh actions of the authorities they turned to force in order to resolve political problems and were thus drawn into the fratricidal war between the regions, to which no end is in sight.

In 1993 TIRP merged with the Tajik Islamic Revival Movement (TIRM), which is now the most serious force opposing the government in Dushanbe. TIRM's main assistance comes from radical Afghan and Arab non-governmental organisations. As a result of their influence it is being increasingly ideologised.

It should be emphasised that the radicalisation of the Islamic opposition on the eve of civil war took place mainly as a result of the clumsy actions of the authorities in Dushanbe. The Islamic nonconformists have still not worked out a model Islamic state structure appropriate for Tajikistan. Their debates are basically about the necessity of maintaining a balance between individual and social interests in any proposed system, and the rejection of the classical models of western capitalism and Soviet socialism. In principle they accept all the institutions of the present state government on condition that these reflect and defend the interests of all regions of the republic equally. Before the start of the bloodshed supporters of 'pure Islam' in Tajikistan were a wholly moderate movement and in other circumstances they evidently might have worked fully with the secularised institutions that had been in place for decades. The views of

the leaders of the Islamic opposition on possible linkages between Islamic norms and modern legal, political and economic systems were notable for their common sense. Nevertheless, the political struggle of Islamic nonconformists was not conducted to establish the rule of the clergy, but in the first instance for a wider representation of the mountain-dwellers in the structures of power, and against the violence being done by the industrially-minded elite on traditional culture. Through them 'tradition' has defined the borders of what is acceptable and unacceptable to them in the process of its modernisation, but has not yet given an answer regarding an escape from the deep crisis which has seized all spheres of human life in Tajikistan.

Notes and References

- ¹ See G. Goibov, *Ranniye pokhody arabov v Srednyuyu Aziyu (644–704gg.)* (Dushanbe, 1989).
- ² In the tenth century the process of the formation of the Tajik people was completed, but the question of the national character of the state of the Samanids is still in dispute. See B. N. Gafurov, *Tadzhiki: Drevneishaya, drevnyaya i srednevekovaya istoriya* (Moscow, 1972), pp. 332–76.
- ³ See Shirin Akiner, 'Islam, the state and ethnicity in Central Asia in historical perspective', *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 24, nos. 2/3, 1996, pp. 95–96.
- ⁴ A. Mukhammedkhodzhayev, *Ideologiya Nakshbandizma* (Dushanbe, 1991), pp. 133–63.
- ⁵ Abdurrahmoni Jomi, *Tukhfat-ul-Akhror: Haft Avrang (The Gifts of Akhror: Seven Thrones)* (Tehran, 1958), p. 384, quoted by Mukhammedkhodzhayev in *Ideologiya Nakshbandizma*, p. 154.
- ⁶ Jami Abdurrahman, *Lirika: Poemy: Vesenni sad* (Dushanbe, 1989), p. 209. This particular poem was translated into Russian by V. Derzhavin.
- ⁷ *Rukaoti Khoja Akhror (The Letters of Khoja Akhror)*, manuscript, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, no. 146, p. 74a. Quoted by Mukhammedkhodzhayev, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- ⁸ With the formation of a politicised Islamic movement in Tajikistan over the past decade the claim began to circulate from one learned work to another that Islam was moving in a particularly orthodox direction in the Garm region, since this region was the first to become a stronghold of Islamic opposition. This widespread fallacy is disproved by all the serious works of field research, the best of which is the three-volume *Tadzhiki Karategina i Darvaza*, edited by N. A. Kislyakova and A. K. Pisarchik (Dushanbe, 1966–76).

Quite another matter is the fact that it is in the mountainous regions of Pripamir'ye that those aspects of the peasant community have been best preserved which reflect natural Islamic rules of conduct in daily life, above all in family relationships. The inhabitants of Garm are distinguished by an ethnic psychology which unites an independent disposition, steadfastness of character, outstanding patience and diligence. However, similar traditional moral systems, with only very minor variations, are also typical of the peasant communities of Kulyab, Zerafshan, Karatag and other areas of the country.

It is noteworthy that the Karatag region long resisted attempts to annex it to Eastern Bukhara, and accepted the rule of the Bukharan emir only in 1877. In this instance there were no religious obstacles to reunification with the emirate; the issue was simply the mountain dwellers' desire for freedom. The Garm region was prominent during the years of the establishment of Soviet power. Opposition to the Bolsheviks here was particularly stubborn and long-lasting.

During the Soviet period traditional Islamic culture in the almost inaccessible mountain regions preserved its character far more than in the valleys and foothills, thanks to their relative geographical isolation from industrial centres. Unofficial religious teaching was more widespread here and more Muslims could read Arabic and understand the Quran. At the same time, all manifestations of folk Islam – belief in the spirits of ancestors, the

miracles of ishans and sacred sites – were preserved in this mountainous region as elsewhere. The pre-Islamic cults of fire, water and fertility were also widespread.

Thus there is no substantiation for allegations often encountered in the press, especially official Tajik publications, that the people of the Garm region follow the fundamentalist Wahhabite school of Islam. As is well known, the Wahhabi consider all the aforementioned manifestations of folk Islam to be inadmissible heresy: prejudices contradicting the belief in one God. The Islamic nonconformists in Tajikistan began incorrectly to be termed Wahhabi by analogy with the puritan movement in Islam which arose in Arabia in the eighteenth century under the influence of the teachings of Abdul Wahhab. The term began to be especially widely used after the appearance of the article 'Vakhkhobizm i islamskaya partiya' by the head of the government's Committee for Religious Affairs Sunnatullo Ibragimzoda in the newspaper *Todzhikistoni Soveti*, 11 December 1990.

Communities of 'pure Islam' in Central Asia manifest only isolated features of the Wahhabite school, such as: strict morality in everyday life; condemnation of luxury and extravagance; strict observance of the Quran's ritual commands on fasting, prayer, charity and family relations; striving for an atmosphere of brotherhood and sincere mutual aid; and the electivity of *imams*. However, adherents of the Central Asian renaissance movement, including the Tajik Islamic Revival Movement, belong to a more moderate and flexible school of religious law that is far more tolerant of innovations and Sufi traditions. A very tiny section of the 'pure Islam' community in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan did actually start calling themselves Wahhabi in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This generally happened after their leaders came back from the *haj*. The socio-economic prosperity they had seen in Saudi Arabia, the richness of religious life there and the feeling of Muslim solidarity which became a reality to them during the time of pilgrimage were all connected with Wahhabism.

In the Tajik press there have been two extensive articles by experts on Islam on the specifics of the renaissance movement and Islamic trends in Tajikistan. These academic works excellently demonstrate the similarities and differences between Tajik religious political nonconformism and foreign analogues; they illustrate the fundamentalist characteristics of the movement and at the same time its divergence from Wahhabism and other reforming trends in 'pure Islam'. (See Pulodi Sultonzod, 'Vakhkhobikho kistand?' ('Who are the Wahhabi?'), *Adabiyet va sanaat*, 2 July 1992; Davlatkhoja Nazirov, 'Mo khama parvardai yak shokhu bargyem' ('We are all cuttings from the same green branch'), *Jumkhuriyat*, 23 October 1991.) Nevertheless, the Islamic oppositionists often continue to be called Wahhabi, and among the common folk are often called by the derivative name 'Vovchiks'.

⁹ See I. Mukhiddinov, *Relikty doislamskikh oby chayev i obryadov u zemledel'tsev Zapadnogo Pamira (19- nachalo 20 veka)* (Dushanbe, 1989). In the appendix to this book on pp. 91–95 is the text of one of the risolya of the farmers, and there is information about other translated and published risolya from both peasants and craftsmen.

¹⁰ A *mazar* is a Muslim cemetery where the remains of local saints lie. There are mazars where only saints are buried.

¹¹ Kislyakova and Pisarchik (eds), *Tadzhiki Karategina i Darvaza*, vol. 3, pp. 82–83.

¹² See *Jumkhuriyat*, 6 August 1994, 11–12 February 1993.

¹³ B.Kh. Karmysheva, *Ocherki etnicheskoi istorii yuzhnykh raionov Tadzhikistana i Uzbekistana* (Moscow, 1976), pp. 148–52.

¹⁴ Thus Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda, formerly *kazi-kalon* (supreme sharia judge) and now vice-president of the opposition Tajik Islamic Revival Movement, comes from a respected clan of ishans in the Kafirnigan region. His father, ishan Turajon, had about a thousand murids. In 1993 Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda was replaced as the head of Muslims in the republic by Khoji Fatkhullokhon Sharifzoda, who comes from a revered clan of ishans in Gissar and Surkhandarya. His father, ishan Sharif Rasullo, had many followers not only in Tajikistan but also in Uzbekistan. Fatkhullokhon Sharifzoda studied for a while under ishan Turajon. (See: *Charogi ruz*, no. 1 (90), 1996).

¹⁵ These data were provided by representatives of the kaziate in November–December 1991. According to data from the muftiate, at the beginning of January 1996 there were 183 Friday mosques, one higher madrassah and nine middle-level madrassahs in the republic. In 1995 1500 people went on pilgrimage to Mecca. The fall in religiosity which was observed in 1993–94 changed back to an increase.

The leaders of the ‘pure Islam’ communities were by no means opponents of Sufism. They did not persecute those who worshipped saints, but they condemned the practice whereby ishans and mullahs would enrich themselves by performing ceremonies at mazars. Thus in Khovalingsky *raion*, Kulyabskaya *oblast'*, followers of ‘pure Islam’ expressed displeasure with the behaviour of the sheikhs of the mazar Khazrati Sulton. Every summer when the pilgrimage to the tombs was in full swing dozens of sheikhs would collect huge gifts but would not share them with disadvantaged and needy local Muslims.

¹⁶ The leaders of TIRM usually received their formative religious education within the family circle. Their level of knowledge of Islamic sciences was very high. The chairman of TIRM for example, Said Abdullo Nuri, was taught by his father, who for many years headed a large collective farm and on retirement handed in his party membership card and became the spiritual leader of the local community. Until the civil war Said Abdullo himself was employed as a translator of Quranic sayings into the Tajik language and he also wrote children’s books on Islamic rites.

The Islamic movement in Tajikistan included both a political agenda and an educational agenda. Up until the 1990s the latter was clearly the more important. Convinced of the impossibility of supporting the Islamic way of life without a change in the consciousness and level of education of Muslims themselves the Islamic nonconformists concentrated their efforts during the 1980s on widening the net of illegal Quranic schools. These schools operated the three-tier system of education worked out by the ‘Muslim Brothers’ (a Middle Eastern religio-political movement). Groups of scholars aged between ten and 30 consisted of between five and ten people, and the scholars at advanced levels taught the younger ones. For reasons of secrecy lessons were held in various different places.

¹⁷ The characteristics of modern reformatory tendencies in Islam and of Muslim social and ideological–political programmes are adequately presented in the collective monograph *Islam v sovremennoi politike stran Vostoka (konets 70-kh – nachalo 80-kh godov)* (Moscow, 1986), pp. 35–44, 67–130. It includes an important contribution towards the development of a methodological scheme for classifying various Islamic movements by Prof. Lyudmila Rafayelovna Polonskaya.

¹⁸ For detailed information on political Islam in Tajikistan see: A. V. Kudryavtsev and A. Sh. Niyazi, ‘“Politichesky Islam”: nachalo 90-kh’, in V. V. Naumkin (ed.), *Sovremennyy islam: kul'tura i politika* (Institut vostokovedeniya RAN, Rossiisky tsentr strategicheskikh i mezhdunarodnykh issledovaniy, Moscow, 1994), pp. 95–128; A. Sh. Niyazi, *Islam v Tadjikistane: Rossiya i musul'mansky mir: Byulleten' referativno-analiticheskoi informatsii* (Institut nauchnoi informatsii po obshchestvennym naukam RAN, Institut vostokovedeniya RAN), no. 10 (40), 1995, pp. 51–56.

The analysis of the social and ecological consequences of industrialisation is based on unpublished material from the Council for the Study of Productive Forces (Sovet po Izucheniyu Proizvoditel'nykh Sil (SOPS)) at the Tajik Academy of Sciences, as well as on data in the following books: *Sostoyanie prirodnoi sredy Tadjikskoi SSR v 1989 godu: Doklad* (Goskomitet Tadjikskoi SSR po okhrane prirody, Dushanbe, 1990); R. K. Mirzoyev (ed.), *Problemy razvitiya i razmeshcheniya proizvoditel'nykh sil Tadjikistana* (SOPS AN Tadjh. SSR, 1988); K. D. Mityukova, *Opyt gosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva Tadjikskoi ASSR (1924–1929 gg.)* (Dushanbe, 1988); A. K. Suchkov, *Sotsialisticheskaya industrializatsiya Tadjikskoi SSR* (Dushanbe, 1965).

¹⁹ In the various climatic zones in Tajikistan population densities vary between 50 and 150 per square kilometre. At this level the ecological self-renewal of the territory is maintained. If it is raised the natural state of the environment is disturbed, and at a density of 200–300 people

very serious alterations are already evident. At the end of the 1980s the population density reached 500–900 per square kilometre in several valley regions; moreover, the elementary infrastructure of services was often absent. Sanitary conditions sharply deteriorated with the increase in population density, the incidence of illness increased, and social problems grew worse, especially in suburban settlements.

The situation is even worse today. Ruined peasants have moved to towns or large settlements, where at least there is a relative guarantee of security. One fifth of the entire population – 1,200,000 people – live in the capital, Dushanbe, compared with around 600,000 just five years ago, of whom at least 200,000 have since left the republic or moved to the more stable Leninabad *oblast'*.

²⁰ The basic indicators of the standard of living on the eve of civil war in Tajikistan are to be found in the article 'Tajikistan' by Aziz Niyazi in Mohiaddin Mesbahi (ed.), *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union: Domestic and International Dynamics* (University of Florida Press, 1994), pp. 164–90.

²¹ On the social and ecological problems connected with the Rogun hydroelectric power station, see: Aziz Niyazi, 'Das Roguner Wasserkraft in Tajikistan: Politische Aspekte', in *Ökologische Situation und Umweltkonflikte auf dem Gebiet der ehemaligen UdSSR: Zentralasien und Russland* (Arbeitspapier 27, Institut für Internationale Politik, Berlin, September 1994), pp. 31–39; and Aziz Niyazi, 'Rogunskaya GES v Tadjikistane: sotsial'no-politicheskiye i ekologicheskiye aspekty problemy', in V. V. Naumkin (ed.), *Postsovetskoye musul'manskoye prostranstvo: religiya, politika, ideologiya* (Institut vostokovedeniya RAN, Rossiisky tsentr strategicheskikh i mezhdunarodnykh issledovaniy, Moscow, 1994), pp. 195–200.

(Translated from the Russian by Geraldine Fagan)