

ISLAM IN TATARSTAN IN 1940-1980-IES: CONDITIONS OF EXISTENCE AND SURVIVAL

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The research is relevant due to the strengthening of the role of the Islamic factor in social, cultural and political processes of contemporary Russian society. In this connection some of the causes of this phenomenon are connected to the Soviet atheistic past and require a careful study. The aim of the paper is to study forms and methods of preservation and succession of Muslim traditions and values in Tatarstan under the conditions of domination of atheistic ideology. The leading approach to the study of this issue has become a civilizational approach which allowed a comprehensive consideration of the object of research. The main results of the study are as follows: we identified forms and methods of functioning of official Muslim religious associations in Tatarstan in 1940-1980. The methods of adaptation of Muslims to the harsh conditions of atheistic environment were studied. The article can be useful in preparation of educational literature on the relevant topics as well as in practical activity of state institutions implementing policies in the spiritual sphere.

Keywords: Muslims ; Soviet state ; Tatarstan ; atheistic propaganda ; unofficial Islam.

INTRODUCTION

The ruling elite of the Soviet state considered religion as its competitor in the sphere of influence on spiritual, moral and philosophical foundations of individuals. This can be seen both in legislative and regulatory activities and the practical actions of the authorities. And if in the first years of Soviet power sharply negative actions against Islam were not observed, which was caused by the need to gain the trust of the Muslims, later all denominations of the state was subjected to persecution.

In this regard, in 1920s-1930s Soviet authorities initiated the mass anti-religious campaign where the Soviet propaganda portrayed the believers as "... opponents of socialism and the Soviet system" (Odintsov, 1995) and religious workers were portrayed as "...an implicit or explicit anti-revolutionary force" (Odintsov, 1995). As a result, a considerable part of the clergy was forced to abandon its activities, and those who did not do it suffered the repression. So, according to the Commission under the President of the Russian Federation on rehabilitation of victims of political repressions during the years of Soviet power, 500 thousand religious figures were subjected to repressions, among them 200 thousand people were executed (Krasikov, 2000). Those religious leaders who managed to avoid direct repressions were taken under special control. The atheistic propaganda achieved significant success in nurturing a generation of downright atheists. By 1931 the number of members of the Union of atheists in Tatarstan, namely among citizens of the Tatar

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nationality was 16872 people (Kasymov, 1932). For more than 25 years, religion and its associations lost their significance and status as relatively independent and powerful institutions of the society as they were before 1917.

The situation changed when the World War II began. Representatives of all religious denominations that functioned on the territory of the USSR made Patriotic appeals to their followers. Representatives of Islam which was the second largest denomination in the USSR did the same (Kuroyedov, 1982).

During the war when the role of religion became stronger (Malashenko, 1998), the authorities made some concessions to religious associations of the country. Since that time a new stage in the social life of believers and clergy in the Soviet state began, where state and party agencies had the right to suppress any form of dissidence, including religious one.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodological basis of the research is the civilizational approach. It let us consider the conditions of survival and existence of the Muslim traditions in Tatarstan in a multifaceted format, namely social and cultural, legal, economic and political aspects.

When working on the article, the author was guided by certain principles of historical research: the principles of historicism and objectivity. The first of them was obliged not to “pull out” the facts and events from historical context, but explore them from the point of view of their emergence and development in the context of the Soviet social, cultural and political reality. While investigating the object of the study, the principle of objectivity helped to dissociate from a variety of subjective factors that could affect the objectivity of the research that is political attitudes, national and religious aspirations, etc.

Historical research methods were used, namely problem and chronological one that was used when structuring and presenting the material that made it possible to trace the logic of relations development between the authorities and the Muslim Ummah of the Republic in given chronological frameworks; synchronistic method which gave an opportunity to consider the events and processes in the life of Muslims in different areas of Tatarstan taking place in one period; statistical method that was used in the definition of Muslims religious activity (here it means the official data on the number of religious rites and volumes of income of religious associations) at different stages of the studied period.

RESULTS

The concentration of Muslims ‘ religious life at the unofficial level

The Soviet state stopped fighting against religion in 1920-1930, but in 1940-1980 continued to consider the community of believers and the clergy as something

alien or even hostile to the Soviet system. It was manifested in the actions of the authorities but they always had the goal to weaken and as a result, destroy the influence of religion in the Soviet society.

When a big amount of prayer houses were closed and destroyed in the late 1930s, in 1943 the Soviet government recognized the necessity of concluding a truce with the society of believers including Muslims.

Since then the believers started making a request to register religious associations and to open prayer houses. However, most of the applications were denied. So, from 1944 to 1947 in Tatarstan only 11 Muslim associations had an opportunity to function (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 4, sheet 33). At that time only in 1945, Muslims of Tatarstan handed in 30 applications for the registration of religious associations. In December 1947 10 similar applications were rejected for one week only (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 3, leaves 76-77).

In this regard, the believers were forced to meet for collective worship in non-authorized, but functioning communities and groups. According to the Commissioner of the Council for religious affairs at the Council of Ministers of Tatarstan, in 1948, there were 25 similar Muslim communities. The number of illegally acting mullahs for 1 February 1949 was 32 (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 2, sheets 21, 23). But there was a reason to believe that there were much more communities like that during that period.

In 1961 the recording of religious associations and the clergy was carried out within the framework of which it was assumed to take account of all the functioning religious communities and groups, but its results disappointed the authorities. Summarizing the results of this campaign it was revealed the following: 646 unofficial Muslim associations, and 366 mullahs who worked illegally (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 11, sheet 107; The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 13, sheet 88). Records showed that people who were engaged into religious activity held senior positions in the past, worked in the field of education, on farms, in manufacturing and served in the Soviet Army. These data did not correspond to the stereotype of the time that the illiterate layers of society were exposed to the influence of religion.

Meeting places of unofficial Muslim associations

Due to the lack of premises for performance of collective pray on Fridays or festivals, the local Muslims were forced to gather on the territories of Tatar cemeteries. As a rule, a funeral process was supervised by either unregistered mullahs, or activists of illegally functioning religious associations. They not only followed the correct execution of the rituals, but also determined the place of burial,

thereby fulfilling the administrative management of the funeral. At the entrance of some of the cemeteries one could see religious quotations from the Quran. For example, at the entrance to the cemetery of Arsk town one could see the sign of “Arsk Muslim cemetery” with a saying in Arabic “There Is No God but Allah” (Central state archive of historical-political documentation of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund 15, inventory 8, case 1275ã, sheet 18). There were facts when the leaders of local authorities allowed the believers to perform rituals in graveyards secretly. For example, in Large Berezi, the village of Arsk district, believers, with the implicit consent of the Chairman of the local village, erected a large mosque that was intended to be open for Eid al-Adha 27 February, 1969 (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 2, case 40, sheet 37). And when the believers decided to hang the emblem of the Muslim Crescent over a new entrance of the Volga region cemetery in Kazan city, the authorities forbade to do so for the reason that “... the Soviet municipal enterprise cannot act under religious emblems and mottos” (Central state archive of historical-political documentation of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund 15, inventory 8, case 1275ã, sheet 16).

In addition to empty mosques, prayer houses and cemeteries there were also other places of meeting like “wellsprings” and “Holy graves”. Pilgrimage to such places was only in warm summer months, usually on Fridays. The local authorities strongly discouraged those unauthorized congregations of Muslims. However, according to official recordings of those years, in 1960-1970s there were 16 Muslim Holy sites in Tatarstan (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 2, case 41, sheet 25).

The factors of succession of Muslim traditions and values under the rule of atheistic propaganda: official and unofficial Muslim clergy, Muslim families

Due to the generation that received full religious education before 1917, unauthorized Muslim communities had mullahs who knew the tenets of Islam and its rituals very well. One can say that in 1960s almost in every Tatar village there was a man or a group of people that could lead the services, perform ceremonies according to the canons of Islam and also to explain the meaning of surahs and ayats. They put forward religious life among people. However, the number of mullahs was gradually reduced.

Such rites as “isemkushu”, “sunnat”, “nikah”, “janaza” were quite common, especially in rural areas. So, in 1961, among the inhabitants of Old Kiyasly village of the Oktyabrsky district, where the mosque functioned, the ceremony of naming was performed in 48%, nikah – 86,6%, janaza – in 92% of cases; in such villages as Kurmanaevo, Stepnoe Ozero and Krivoe Ozero where mosques also functioned, these figures were 54%, 82% and 100% respectively (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 11, sheet 11).

One of the most important circumstances of the survival of Islam in the conditions of the atheistic ideology was preservation of life of many Tatar families, where the younger generation was able to join the older one. The effectiveness of religious education in the family is clearly demonstrated by the report of the Commissioner for religious affairs in Tatarstan in 1966 when people celebrated the festival of Eid al-Adha. According to the report, about 5000 believers took part in this festival that was held near Mardzhani mosque, where 20% were believers in the age of 25-35 years. In Chistopol mosque there were about 1600 - 1700 people at the service, where 30% were young people (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 1, case 11, sheet 212). These facts suggest that the preservation of Muslim traditions in the family was significant not only for rural areas but also for urban ones.

Despite the fact that in the media one of the tenets of Soviet ideology about “the extinction of the activities of religious associations” was constantly declared, such an indicator of religious activity as the income of the religious communities and groups, claimed the opposite. So, if according to the Muslim associations in 1967, they amounted 120 thousand rubles, then in 1968 it was more than 140 thousand rubles. The growth of income of Mardzhani mosque was particularly marked, as in 1965 it was 54026 rubles, and in 1968 – 97909 rubles (The national archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Fund R-873, inventory 2, case 40, leaves 17-38). It is necessary to mention that the main source of income was voluntary donations of Muslims.

DISCUSSIONS

The investigated problem attracts attention of the scientific community: historians, political scientists, sociologists for a long period of time. In works published in the Soviet period there were ideological dogmas and stereotypes of the Soviet era (Yablokov, 1972; Tagirov, 1972; Baltanov, 1973; Ishmukhametov, 1979). Nevertheless, the historical material, of course, is of great scientific interest.

For works published in perestroika and post-perestroika periods it was significant new understanding of events and processes in the life of Muslims of the Soviet state, including Tatarstan (Mukhametshin, 1993; Mukhametshin, 2003; Mukhametshin, 2007; Landa, 1995; Braslavsky, 1997; Malashenko, 1998; Yunusova, 1999; Nabiev, 2002; Minnullin, 2006).

In foreign historiography this subject has also found its coverage. In this regard it is necessary to mention the works of A. Bennigsen and E. Wimbush (1986), W. Fletcher (1987), J. Roy (2000).

CONCLUSION

Thus, the period under review, which was characterized by massive atheistic propaganda, and administrative pressure, the religious life of Muslims was

concentrated in illegally functioning religious associations. A special role was designated to the places of congregational pray in unofficial Muslim associations like empty buildings of mosques, the houses of believers, Tatar cemeteries and Holy places. Transmission of religious values was carried out mainly at domestic level. In such circumstances Islam could ensure the survival of its values and to preserve some position in social and cultural life of the society.

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