



RELIGIOUS VIEWS AND REPRESENTATIONS IN SAMARKAND ETHNIC CULTURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the history of the emergence and evolution of religious views and beliefs in the Samarkand oasis. It offers an analysis of the forms of pre-Islamic beliefs among the local population. It also highlights the contemporary occurrences of various syncretic customs and rituals.

KEYWORDS: *totemism, "incense burning", shamanism, fortune-telling, witchcraft, parochialism, Zoroastrianism, Navruz, Christianity, Islam.*

INTRODUCTION

The spiritual values and cultural heritage of the Uzbek people have for centuries served to increase the cultural value of Eastern civilization. Additionally, the region in which we live is a region where a great variety of religious beliefs and cultures flow in confluence. In short, Uzbekistan is, one of the cradles of not only the East but also the entire human civilization. As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted on the UN General Assembly, "the invaluable contribution of many brilliant representatives of the Central Asian Renaissance to Islam and world civilization" should be remembered [1].

THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

It is known that in studying the history and culture of each nation, it is necessary to rely primarily on the factor of religion. As the famous English philosopher K. Dawson pointed out, "religion is the key to history, and if we do not understand the religious roots of culture, we cannot understand culture itself." [2] From this point of view, in the study of the ethnic culture of the Samarkand oasis, of course, it is necessary to study the scientific and philosophical aspects of the religious beliefs and views of ethnic groups living in the region.

Historical sources testify that before the introduction of Islam into the life of the peoples of Central Asia, belief in ancestral spirits, magical rituals and cults representing the forces of nature, along with animism, fetishism, shamanism, religions such as Tangism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity were widespread. [3] In particular, in the

Samarkand oasis, different religions, beliefs and cults were in fact practiced.

Today, a number of ceremonies and rituals are performed by the local population in the Samarkand oasis. Some of these traditions are ancient and are passed down from ancestors to generations in the historical process. In particular, in the pre-Islamic period, the religious thinking of the people of the oasis, like many other nations in the world, was based on primitive-religious views. That is, the religious landscape of the universe had a totemistic, animistic, fetishistic, shamanistic appearance.

Below we will focus on some primitive forms of religion, the elements of which are preserved in the Samarkand oasis to this day.

Fetishism. Fetishism is worshipping in inanimate object that is considered pagan and supernatural - the worship of fetishes played an important role in the lives of ancient peoples.

"Among the objects considered fetish, the most common are human and animal bones and tombstones. Bone remains are believed to protect the fetish owner from natural disasters, diseases, and evil spirits. The tombstones served as an object containing spirits that guarded the peace of the deceased. Worship of the tomb later led to the creation of sacred shrines". [4]

In Uzbekistan, including the Samarkand oasis, the worship of fetishism and adherence to its customs has been preserved for a long time.

With the advent of Islam in Samarkand, the struggle against the remnants of fetishism, such as the belief in the "divine power" of inanimate objects, began. This is because the custom of fetishism in Islam is "shirk." "Shirk is the establishment of the



attributes of Allah to something other than Himself." [5] To be more precise, polytheism is an expectation of a blessing, an event, a request from someone other than Allah, a creature or an object, a hope. However, some complications of fetishism persist even today. According to professor of cultural studies O.Nishonova, "we still have women who believe in the remnants of fetishism. They sanctify inanimate objects and plants, such as eyeglasses, incense, medallions, peppercorns, gooseberries, black pepper, as symbols of protection from harm, protection from eye contact, and good luck". [6] Complications of fetishism persist in the Samarkand oasis to this day. In particular, some residents of the oasis still believe in the supernatural power of incense and red pepper plants. There is no definite information as to when the incense-burning habit arose. However, some believe that when incense is burned or hung on the wall (gate) or cradle of the house, it "touches the eye" and protects people from rocks and disasters. In fact, the incense plant is a medicinal plant, and its body and seeds have been known in medicine since ancient times to relieve a number of diseases when used by boiling it in water or smoking. With the advent of Islam in Uzbekistan, a large part of the local population began to pay more attention to the healing properties of incense, rather than mystical.

Shamanism. Shamanism is a primitive form of religion that embodies the perfect view of the mystical state. Shamanism is derived from the Tungusic word "saman", which means "communicator with spirits", "magician". [7] Shamanistic views have been widespread in Central Asia since ancient times and have played an important role in the history of the Turkic peoples, including the Uzbek people. The term is called "bakhshi", "parikhon", "kushnoch" and "folbin" in the local language.

Bakhshi. Indigenous Uzbek ethnoses viewed people who practiced as bakhshis as "people who heal people with the help of spirits" [8]. Usually, the bakhshis used to heal people who were possessed by evil spirits, such as demons, giants, and *ajina*. Bakhshis perform their duty with strong spiritual excitement and hysteria. Later, the ability of the bakhshis to heal with the help of spirits changed to a state of memorization of various terms, lapars, and epics. As a result, bakhshi plays an important role in the examples of folklore. [9]

Fortune telling. Fortune-telling is also common among the population as a magical form. The Arabic word "Folbin" means "Fol" - destiny, "bin" - seer, that is, the seer of human destiny. [10] If we look at the history of fortune-telling, it is

unknown how long people have been practicing it. But historical sources show that fortune-tellers were very abundant in the ancient Scythian tribes. Some of them tried to practice to see destiny on willow twigs. In this case, the bundles of willows are gathered together, the bundles are untied and the twigs are gathered in a row. Then they look at them and start making predictions. During the recitation, they gather the more twigs one by one and make another nest. This method of divination is inherited from their ancestors. [11]

Fortune-telling is still common among the population of the Samarkand oasis. People who practice fortune-telling are constantly engaged in persuading people, predicting a certain event in their lives, making predictions based on pre-existing symptoms, and determining the cause. Fortune-telling is also forbidden in Islam.

Later, due to socio-economic changes in the way of life of the local population, primitive religious views were transformed into a form of polytheistic belief. In particular, Zoroastrianism is widely developed in Central Asia. Zoroastrianism, which has a long history (II millennium BC – 8-9th centuries BC), was the leading religion in Central Asia, especially in Sogdiana (Samarkand). Through the colonial movement of the Sogdians, however, the religion spread throughout the region. Xuan Zian, a Chinese traveler and Buddhist monk who visited Central Asia in the 7th century, reported that "the Turks believed in fire, so they did not use a wooden throne". This implies the strong belief of the Turks in Zoroastrianism. [12]

According to Zoroastrian belief, the four elements of nature are recognized as sacred. These are: water, fire, earth and air. From this point of view, human behavior is limited to these elements, sanctifying them. The Zoroastrians, after the death of a person, kept his body away from water, fire, earth and put it on a special hill, and after that they put it in special containers called ostadons. Such ostadons were widely used by the population of Samarkand oasis in 5-6th centuries in Payarik, Taylak, Aqdarya, Urgut and Kofirqala regions. In particular, we can mention as examples the "horse-shaped ostadon" found in Payarik district of the 5th-6th centuries kept in the Museum of Art and Culture of Uzbekistan (Fig. 1), "ostadon lid with a picture of a human head" found in Taylak district (Fig. 3), the "ostadon in the form of a pavilion" found in Mullakurgan village, Akdarya district, the "ostadon decorated in the form of a cross-shaped net" found in the Kafirqala area (Fig. 2), and the "ostadon with the symbol of guards and the sun" found in Urgut district.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

The sacred book of Zoroastrianism "Avesto" contains valuable information about the socio-economic and cultural processes of that time, the traditions of the primitive statehood, the role of various social classes in society, family life and related customs and rituals. In particular, the family-marriage relationship, the responsibilities of family members and the head of family are described in detail. Great attention has also been paid to respecting women's rights, ensuring the inviolability and stability of the family, and fulfilling the duties of parents to their children and children to their parents.

In Zoroastrianism, seasonal rituals and family-based rituals have also developed over the centuries. In particular, the celebration of Navruz, ancestral beliefs, lighting a bonfire, wearing a *sidraposh* and wearing a white belt (initiating teenagers into Zoroastrianism) and other ceremonies can be cited.

It is known that fire was considered one of the sacred elements for Zoroastrians. Beruni and several other authors have written that even in the early Middle Ages, when the peoples of Central Asia gathered in groups, common ceremonial meals were cooked, there were special houses for people to gather, and the stoves in these houses were always burning. Uzbeks still light bonfires at weddings and other ceremonies. Zoroastrians believed that fire protects from various calamities and malicious demons, brings happiness and success in life. Fire-related customs are still more common in the Samarkand oasis than in other regions.

Navruz is one of the three most celebrated holidays in Zoroastrianism. Ethnologist D. Dorjjeva, studying the holiday of Navruz among the East Turkestani people, notes that in Abulqasim Firdavsi's famous work "Shokhnoma" Navruz is mentioned as a holiday celebrated in the period when "The Sun enters the Sheep Constellation" (from March 21 to April 20). [13] Navruz is celebrated as the beginning of a new year. This holiday is still celebrated by the people of Samarkand oasis as a national value.

Christianity spread in Central Asia in the 4th and 6th centuries AD. Nestorian temples were built in Samarkand. In the 6th century in Samarkand there was a Christian bishop. In the south of the city lived a Christian community. Doctor of Historical Sciences A. Atakhodjaev described the baptism in the sand found in the pyramid complex in Kushtepa in Urgut district - two men, one sitting and one standing, holding a cross. He also mentions that there are fireplaces belonging to Zoroastrians in this pyramid. This indicates that all religions in Central Asia were in harmony.

In addition, the mausoleum in Samarkand, named after the prophet Daniel, is revered by representatives of Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

It is known that the Uzbeks, who have been under the influence of various religious ideologies for a long historical period, converted to Islam in the early VIII century as a result of the influx of Arabs into Central Asia. The spread of the new religion among the indigenous peoples lasted for centuries. Islam has begun to incorporate ancient religious ideas, customs and rituals, prayers and ideas that are prevalent among the people, taking into account local characteristics. As a result, Islam appears to be somewhat syncretic in Central Asian context. In the beginning, the process of conversion of the local population to Islam was difficult. They did not want to give up their centuries-old beliefs and follow new religious beliefs and customs instead. As a result, the population was forced to pay (increased) life tax and voluntarily converted to Islam.

In its 13th century development, Islam has taken a firm place in the religious beliefs of the people living in the oasis. Today, the daily customs and rituals of the people of the oasis are carried out not only in accordance with the rules of Islamic Sharia, but also in accordance with national historical values. This shows that Islam is perfect in form and content, and that the spirit of tolerance for the



national values and other religious beliefs of any ethnic group is high.

Samarkand has long been an open city for all nations and peoples, where peoples of fire, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam have lived in harmony. Tolerance has long been a tradition and value for the people of Samarkand. That is why Samarkand is a unique place of culture of interethnic harmony and interreligious tolerance.

CONCLUSION

In short, the relations of ethnic groups living in Samarkand region have led not only to the commonality of religious values, but also to the convergence of their daily life, spiritual culture.

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