



Article

# Social Life of The Population of The Bukhara Khanate Until The Mid-17th Century: Protest Movements

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the social life of the population of the Bukhara Khanate up to the mid-17th century and the protest movements that emerged during this period. Political instability, heavy tax burdens, and the oppressive policies of rulers led to growing dissatisfaction among the population, resulting in numerous uprisings. In particular, the revolts in the cities of Balkh and Tashkent illustrate the harsh nature of the ruling elite's governance. Additionally, the article examines socio-political events during the reigns of Imamqulixon and Nadr Muhammadxon, detailing the destruction of cities and the deterioration of living conditions based on historical sources.

**Keywords:** Social, Political Instability, Poladchi, Kōkaldosh, Qoratog', Ashpara, Kharvar, Stirrup

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 17th century, political fragmentation intensified in the Bukhara Khanate. Representatives of the ruling dynasty in various provinces and major cities sought to establish their own independent rule. High-ranking state officials and military commanders chose not to submit to central authority. Continuous external invasions at the state's borders and the absence of political stability further deteriorated the socio-economic condition of the khanate [1]. As a result, the living standards of the population declined, and tensions escalated [2]. Additionally, excessive taxation and the imposition of various obligations on the population further worsened their situation. Consequently, during the Ashtarkhanid period, numerous uprisings and protest movements arose in different regions of the khanate. One such rebellion occurred in 1608 in the city of Balkh, located on the southern borders of the khanate. The reason for this uprising was the oppression of the local population by Shohbek Kōkaldosh, an official from the Uzbek Poladchi tribe [3]. Appointed as the governor of Balkh, Shohbek Kōkaldosh carried out brutal acts of persecution against the inhabitants. He subjected individuals accused of crimes or violations to severe torture and humiliation. Dissatisfied with his tyranny, the people of Balkh appealed to the ruling dynasty's representatives, Imamqulixon and Nadr Muhammad Sulton, demanding Shohbek Kōkaldosh's removal from office. However, their petitions were ignored. As a result, the outraged citizens of Balkh staged an uprising. According to historian Muhammad Yusuf Munshiy, Shohbek Kōkaldosh, fearing the rebels, fled and took refuge in the Abdullaxon madrasa. He fortified its gates and rained gunfire upon the approaching crowd. However, a group of young insurgents managed to breach a section of the madrasa wall at night and infiltrated the building. They captured Shohbek Kōkaldosh and dragged him before the angry crowd. The rebels, who had suffered under his oppression, carried out his execution in a

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horrifying manner. First, his head was torn from his body by large bulls, and then his dismembered remains were thrown into boiling oil [4]. Thus, Shohbek Kōkaldosh's reign of terror in Balkh came to an end. In 1611, following the death of Vali Muhammadxon, his nephew, Imamqulixon (1611–1642), one of the most prominent figures of the ruling dynasty, ascended to the throne of the Bukhara Khanate. He appointed his brother, Nadr Muhammadxon, as the governor of Balkh [5]. Imamqulixon ruled the khanate for over thirty years, during which he managed to maintain relative stability and significantly centralize the state [6]. Nevertheless, public discontent and uprisings continued during his reign. These movements were particularly intensified after Imamqulixon launched military campaigns against the Kazakhs and Kalmyks, who posed a threat to the northeastern borders of the khanate. In 1612–1613, he pursued them as far as Qoratog' and Ashpara [7].

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study utilizes a historical-analytical method, primarily employing qualitative analysis to examine and interpret socio-political phenomena in the Bukhara Khanate until the mid-17th century.

Firstly, historical source analysis was the main methodological approach. This included critically reviewing primary historical texts, chronicles, and accounts from contemporary historians, particularly the works of Muhammad Yusuf Munshiy and other significant medieval sources documenting events from this period. Data collection involved identifying relevant historical documents, categorizing information by date and event, and cross-verifying them to ensure accuracy.

Secondly, a comparative historical analysis was employed to evaluate similarities and differences between various uprisings in Balkh and Tashkent. This helped uncover the patterns and causes of protest movements, highlighting the socio-political factors contributing to instability and unrest.

Thirdly, the study applied the method of case-study analysis, focusing intensively on specific significant uprisings, such as the revolt against Shohbek Kōkaldosh in Balkh (1608) and the rebellion in Tashkent against Iskandar Sulton. Each event was examined thoroughly, considering the socio-economic context, key actors, motives, consequences, and implications for the broader historical narrative.

Finally, an interpretive historical approach was utilized to contextualize the actions of rulers like Imamqulixon and Nadr Muhammadxon, interpreting historical evidence within broader socio-political structures of the khanate, and critically analyzing the long-term impacts of their policies on the population.

By integrating these methods, the research ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the social dynamics, governance issues, and historical outcomes within the Bukhara Khanate during the studied timeframe.

## 3. Results and Discussion

During these campaigns, a large number of nomads were exterminated, while the survivors fled into forests and mountains to escape. As a result of these military campaigns, Tashkent and its surrounding territories came under the control of the Bukhara Khanate. Imamqulixon appointed his son, Iskandar Sulton, as the governor of Tashkent [8]. However, Iskandar Sulton ruled with extreme harshness, imposing additional taxes and levies on the local population. This oppressive governance led to an uprising among the people of Tashkent against Iskandar Sulton. During the rebellion, Iskandar Sulton was killed [9]. The news of his son's death deeply affected Imamqulixon. In response, he sought military assistance from his brother, Nadr Muhammadxon, the governor of Balkh. Reinforcements arrived from Balkh and Badakhshan, and Imamqulixon led a military campaign to besiege Tashkent [10].

The city's residents could not withstand the prolonged siege. Eventually, one of the city gates was destroyed, allowing the khan's forces to enter. The city was reduced to ruins. Upon hearing of his son's death, Imamqulixon, overwhelmed with grief and rage, swore an oath that he would not end the massacre until his horse's stirrups were soaked in blood. In adherence to his vow, he ordered the mass execution of Tashkent's population, leading to the deaths of a significant portion of its inhabitants [11]. Young and old alike were put to the sword. A large portion of the innocent population fell victim to Imamqulixon's oath. The number of those executed grew so immense that even military commanders, moved by pity for the common people, pleaded with the khan to halt the slaughter. However, Imamqulixon insisted that he had sworn not to stop until the blood of the rebels reached his horse's stirrups and that he would not break his vow until this was fulfilled [12]. Faced with this dire situation, the military officials and nobles convened to find a resolution. They sought the guidance of religious scholars, who issued a fatwa proposing a symbolic solution: a pool of water should be prepared, deep enough to reach the stirrups of the khan's horse, and the blood of the executed should be mixed into it [13].

By doing so, the oath would be considered fulfilled. The nobles conveyed the scholars' ruling to Imamqulixon, and the act was carried out as prescribed. Thus, the khan's vow was symbolically completed, bringing an end to the massacre. In the later years of Imamqulixon's rule, no major uprisings or protests were recorded. This was largely because, among the Ashtarkhanid rulers, no other reign saw as much improvement in the social conditions of the people as during Imamqulixon's time. However, by the mid-1640s, unrest resurfaced in Balkh. Initially, these movements were directed against the policies of Nadr Muhammadxon (1642–1645), but later, they shifted towards resisting the siege of Balkh by the Mughal princes Murad Bakhsh and Aurangzeb [4, 35]. Nadr Muhammadxon's reign was short-lived, lasting only three years. Unlike his brother, Imamqulixon, who had worked to strengthen the khanate, Nadr Muhammadxon dismantled much of what had been achieved. He divided power among more than ten sons and nephews, leading to further fragmentation. In the autumn of 1645, he was dethroned and fled to Balkh [1, 180]. However, within just three months, a rebellion erupted against him in Balkh, as he was accused of treason [14].

This was because Nadr Muhammadxon, in an attempt to reclaim his lost authority, had sought military assistance from the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. However, instead of offering assistance, Shah Jahan saw this as an opportunity to seize Balkh entirely. To achieve this, he dispatched his two sons with a large army towards Balkh. In this dire situation, Nadr Muhammadxon fled, leaving the region vulnerable. For the next two years, Balkh was subjected to extensive looting and devastation. The living conditions of the local population worsened significantly, leading to rising poverty. Market prices soared, and famine spread throughout the region. According to historian Muhammad Yusuf Munshiy, the price of one kharvar (approximately 300 kg, the load a donkey could carry) of wheat skyrocketed to 100,000 rupees. Many residents were forced to abandon their homes and flee northward across the Amu Darya into other regions of Transoxiana [15].

Amid these harsh conditions, in 1648, various districts of Balkh rose in rebellion against the invaders. This, in turn, benefited the Bukhara forces in their struggle against the Mughals. Under such circumstances, Abdulazizxon led a large army into Balkh and successfully expelled the forces of Shah Jahan's sons. However, it was not long before Nadr Muhammadxon reappeared in Balkh. His rule, though, was short-lived once again. This time, Abdulazizxon sent his brother Subhonqulixon against him. These continuous conflicts further worsened the plight of the people of Balkh. Additionally, frequent raids by neighboring states into the khanate's territories further destabilized the social and economic conditions of the population. Especially from the mid-1650s onward, the frequent incursions of Khiva Khanate's forces into the provinces and districts of the Bukhara Khanate, along with the deteriorating relations with Balkh, led to severe consequences.

The khanate's economic system continued to decline, becoming increasingly unstable. In such a situation, as in previous periods, the primary means of replenishing the state treasury was through taxes and various levies. The burden of these taxes, however, fell mostly on the common people. These mounting pressures eventually pushed the population to the brink, leading to widespread discontent and unrest.

#### 4. Conclusion

the social life of the population of the Bukhara Khanate up to the mid-17th century reflects the complex historical processes of the era. During this period, the khanate faced internal political fragmentation, economic hardships, and widespread public dissatisfaction. As central authority weakened, local officials sought to establish their own independent rule. A governance system based on heavy taxation and oppression further fueled public discontent, leading to numerous uprisings. The revolts in Balkh and Tashkent serve as clear examples of this instability, as they further exacerbated political turmoil. In particular, public dissatisfaction reached its peak during the reigns of Imamqulixon and Nadr Muhammadxon.

The Tashkent uprising and the Balkh rebellion were brutally suppressed, resulting in the deaths of many innocent people. These events demonstrate that the lack of political stability, excessive taxation, and power struggles among rulers severely disrupted social life in the Bukhara Khanate. Additionally, external invasions by neighboring states further contributed to economic instability, worsening the overall situation for the population. This study confirms that the crisis of the Bukhara Khanate in the 17th century was primarily driven by internal social and political factors. In this regard, this period should be examined not only in terms of the khanate's internal politics but also as an important historical case for analyzing its social structure, the resilience of its people, and the governing strategies of its rulers.

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