


On The History of The Revival of Islamic Traditions in Uzbekistan During The Years of Independence

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Abstract: This article analyzes the processes and history of the restoration of Islamic religious traditions and interfaith tolerance in Uzbekistan, drawing upon normative-legal documents and scholarly literature.

Keywords: Republic of Uzbekistan; Islam; religious tolerance; spiritual values; confession; religious organization; Constitution; freedom of conscience.

Introduction

During the years of Independence, Uzbekistan underwent profound changes in its socio-economic and spiritual-cultural spheres. These transformational processes continue to this day. As is known, our people endured the Soviet colonial period for more than 130 years. During that tragic era, many of the Uzbek people's values and customs were trampled upon and struck by the Soviet authorities. Regarding this, the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, assessed the spiritual values and traditions of the Uzbek people as follows:

“Despite any cruelty or oppression of the Soviet colonial period, the Uzbek people preserved their language, religion, and faith. Even in times when falsehood and violence prevailed, true patriots lived among us, guided by the welfare of their nation and people.” [2, p. 26]

In independent Uzbekistan, harmonious and benevolent relations were established between state bodies and leaders of religious organizations. On 14 July 1991, for the first time in Uzbekistan's legal practice, the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” was adopted. After the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted, freedom of conscience and relations between the state and religion were regulated

on constitutional principles. On 1 May 1998, a new edition of the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” was adopted.

On 27 March 1992, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan signed a Decree “On Declaring the First Days of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as Public Holidays.” Pursuant to the President’s Decree of 2 June 1990 “On the Pilgrimage (Hajj) of Muslims to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” for the first time in the history of our people, the government itself became the sponsor of annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. During the years of Independence, more than 32 000 Uzbek citizens performed the Hajj in Mecca and Medina. Hundreds of mosques were returned to Muslims, and new ones were built. The newspaper *Islom nuri* (“Light of Islam”) began publication. These measures were not simply concessions to believers; rather, they marked the revival of our people’s ancient rites, customs, and values, and the reawakening of our ancestors’ spirit.

In the short but honorable years of Independence, a number of judicial and legal reforms were also implemented. Naturally, existing laws were, above all, aimed at protecting individual freedom and safeguarding all civil rights. In the years of Independence, documents guaranteeing freedom of conscience for all citizens residing in our republic were adopted, namely the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.” As emphasized in our supreme law, “Freedom of conscience is guaranteed for everyone. Every person has the right to profess any religion or to profess none. No one may be compelled to adopt religious beliefs” [1, p. 8]. Furthermore, the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” states: “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan are equal before the law regardless of their attitude toward religion” [3, p. 225]. These laws, which meet the requirements of our time, guarantee citizens the right to profess a religion without compulsion and to observe religious customs.

It is well known that there are 287 states on Earth, more than 150 nations and ethnic groups, each with its own laws, traditions, and, of course, worldviews. Every state, based on its people’s history and aspirations, has its own fundamental law – its Constitution. Worldwide, there exist both written and unwritten constitutions [4, p. 12]. A constitution ensures that the values, traditions, and worldview linking a people’s past, present, and future remain in harmony with contemporary realities.

Many states emphasize fundamental principles of governance in their constitutions, while some give priority to fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. Naturally, this is a process shaped by their own worldviews. Although other countries’ constitutions may not significantly differ in structure, they do differ in content. Each country’s constitution envisions economic, social, spiritual, and cultural aspects, with due regard for international norms regarding state structure and organization. When examining social provisions in constitutions around the world, we find that issues of religious tolerance and interfaith concord receive particular attention. Indeed, to say that how these states actually implement, in practice, the freedom of religion—one of the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals—remains one of the pressing concerns of modern people is not an exaggeration.

This issue has also been taken very seriously by the United Nations, which is charged with protecting human rights. A glance at the history of religion shows that, in every era, religions

in the world have been accompanied by conflicts, disputes, and differences. Nevertheless, during those periods, representatives of religions often regarded other faiths, traditions, and values with respect. Today, based on that very principle, all states treat religions other than their own—and the traditions and values of different nations—with respect.

From the earliest years of Independence, the government of the Republic of Uzbekistan established ties with religious organizations. To this end, on 7 March 1992, the Committee for Religious Affairs was formed under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. One of this Committee's main tasks is to represent, in state policy, the interests of religious organizations. The feelings and beliefs of the approximately 140 nationalities and ethnic groups residing in our country are respected. During the years of Independence, special attention has been paid to the development and progress of Islam as well as to other religions and denominations. In our republic, alongside Islam, there exist Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Baptists, Buddhists, Lutherans, and several other faiths and denominations. Initially, 15 religious confessions operated in the republic; today there are 16. Moreover, conditions necessary for inhabitants to practice their religious ceremonies and customs freely have been established. For this purpose, new mosques and madrasas (Islamic educational institutions) were built, and old ones were renovated. Thanks to Independence, the weekly newspaper *Islom nuri* began publication, since Islam has always guided people toward justice and piety and helped prevent them from wrongful deeds.

After achieving Independence, the Uzbek people were given freedom to operate these educational and cultural centers, and new opportunities to develop them were created. These spiritual and educational institutions have been instrumental in raising and nurturing young generations into well-rounded individuals. On 23–24 October 1993, by decision of the Government of Uzbekistan, an international conference on the theme “Life and Era of Imam al-Bukhari” was held in honor of the 1220th anniversary of our great compatriot Imam al-Bukhari and to widely promote his life and scholarly legacy. The Tashkent Islamic Institute is now named after Imam al-Bukhari. Since 1998, the Tashkent Islamic University has also been in operation. Currently, in each region of our country, at least one religious madrasa is functioning. Today, the International Islamic Research Center, the Islamic Institute named after Imam al-Bukhari, the Women's Madrasa named after Eshon Bobokhon, and the madrasas of Abulqosim and Kukaldosh operate in our republic. The course of study at these madrasas lasts five years, during which young people receive both modern and religious education together. Entrance examinations to these madrasas include tests in a foreign language (English), history, and fundamentals of spirituality, attesting to their adoption of contemporary methods.

By decree of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, and in order to benefit from the spiritual potential of Islam, the Committee for Religious Affairs was established under the Cabinet of Ministers. Under its aegis operate the International Islamic Research Institute and 10 madrasas, where more than 1 000 students receive education. To study Islamic teachings and philosophy broadly, to carry out thorough scholarly research on the religious, historical, and cultural heritage of the Uzbek people, and to train highly qualified specialists—such as theologians, jurists, and economists—in 1999, on 7 April, the

Tashkent Islamic University was founded.

In 2007, the city of Tashkent—alongside Tripoli (Libya), Fez (Morocco), and Dakar (Senegal)—was proclaimed the Capital of Islamic Culture for the year 2007 by ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation). On 14–15 August 2007, an international conference titled “Uzbekistan’s Contribution to the Development of Islamic Civilization” was held in Tashkent and Samarkand, commemorating Tashkent’s designation as the 2007 Capital of Islamic Culture. More than 30 scholars from over 30 countries participated.

In 2016, while presiding over the 43rd Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed the establishment, on the grounds of the Imam al-Bukhari memorial complex, of a scientific-research center dedicated to Islamic studies. Subsequently, the President became acquainted multiple times with the project and construction of this center, even determining details such as its color scheme. The Center is tasked with studying the invaluable scholarly and spiritual heritage of our great thinkers, preparing scholarly annotated translations of their works, collecting electronic copies of manuscripts preserved in libraries and archives in our country and abroad, and disseminating them to our people and the global scholarly community. Here, all necessary conditions have been created for in-depth research of our ancestors’ rich legacy and for training qualified specialists. A museum has been organized on the Center’s ground floor, showcasing the life and scholarly travels of Imam al-Bukhari. The museum houses a rare manuscript copy of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

Upon visiting this complex, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that this place should provide visitors with deep insight and knowledge about Imam al-Bukhari. “Another scientific center has appeared on the world map. This Center will bring knowledge and blessings to our country. It will empower our youth with education and strength. Those who study or visit here will gain immense spiritual and intellectual enrichment,” said Shavkat Mirziyoyev [5]. In the past year (2018), the Center has undertaken systematic measures to study and promote the heritage of our great scholars and to establish cooperation with prestigious international institutions.

In conclusion, during the years of Independence, Islamic traditions were revived in Uzbekistan. Today, more than 170 religious organizations operate in the republic, where representatives of over 130 nationalities and ethnic groups residing in Uzbekistan fulfill their religious needs. Moreover, over 1 700 mosques, Christian churches, and other religious centers have been repaired or newly constructed. The religious sentiments, traditions, and customs of all nationalities and ethnic groups living in the country are respected, and all necessary opportunities have been provided for them to conduct their activities.

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