

Muslim Charitable and Cultural-Elucidative Societies of the Beginning of the 20th Century (on the Example of the Orenburg and Ufa Provinces)

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Abstract. The activity of Muslim charitable and cultural-elucidative societies, registered in the Orenburg and Ufa provinces at the beginning of the 20th century is analyzed in the article. The attention is emphasized on the enlighten goals of the Muslim charitable societies. Popular schooling was the major task of the charitable societies.

Keywords: Charitable Societies, Muslim Educational Institutions of the Orenburg and Ufa Provinces, Enlightenment.

1. Introduction

The Revolution of 1905 affected the nation and various strata of population were involved in social life and political struggle. Muslim people were among them. Work on the bill about societies and unions arrangement and activity was started after the “Manifest” of 17 October of 1905 had been proclaimed. The legislative base for social organisms’ initiation became “Temporary regulations about societies and unions” that were ratified by tsar Nicholay II in March of 1906 [1]. These “Temporary regulations” legalized the unified jural standard for the arrangement and activity regulation of all social organisms and unions. After the appearance of this document, eighty-seven different societies were established by Russian Muslims to 1912. Among these societies there were five religious organizations, 48 charitable organizations and 34 elucidative societies.

2. Muslim Charitable and Cultural-Elucidative Societies of the Orenburg Province

Muslim charitable and cultural-elucidative societies of Orenburg province can be divided into urban and rural. The main attention of these societies was paid to popular schooling. Almost every Muslim charitable and cultural-elucidative society had got a library.

The right to organize schools, to support the scholarship holders, to arrange lectures, literary nights, etc was additionally fixed in the charters of these Muslim charitable societies. In the charter of the Orenburg Muslim charitable society, which was registered in June of 1906, was noted that “The society had got the right to organize religious schools, to support the scholarship holders of higher educational institutions, to arrange sanatoriums for poor students, to render assistance to poor people, to arrange lectures, literary nights, and public meetings that was obeyed to general laws and government directions” [2]. Five elementary schools and one public library were kept by this society. In 1910 the society drafted more than one thousand rubles for needs of the school. Z. N. Biburin, B. G. Bayazitov, M.M. Kurpyachev, H.U. Donskoy, A.U. Kapkaev, K.M. Muhametrahimov were the founders of this society. Charity was one of the items of expenses. The addressees of the charity were starving Muslim inhabitants of Buzuluk, Buguruslan and Bugulma districts of Samara province and Belebeev district of Ufa province, who were affected by crop failure in 1906. One thousand rubles were transferred to every chief town of the districts and the representatives were sent to hand out bread to support the starving people. Two similar Muslim societies were set up in 1912. One of them was called “Orenburg society of caring about Muslim students”. It was set up in order to assist the

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development of Muslim educational institutions and provide material assistance to the poor, besides the society carried out the selection of young Muslims in order to direct them to study in higher educational institutions as special state scholarship holders. Another society that was called “The Troitsk Society of stewards” paid its own scholarship to Muslim students, who studied at Stambul Pedagogical Institute, St. Petersburg Medical Institute, Harkov University, etc.

Another Muslim societies of Orenburg province attached particular importance to the issues of Public education. Muslim charitable society of Iletsks gave three hundred rubles to the school needs in 1910. Orsk Muslim charitable society organized the pedagogic course and in 1911 fifteen persons studied there. They studied basic foundations of religious doctrine, pedagogic, arithmetic, geography [3].

Besides education, these societies paid much attention to libraries and reading rooms. In 1911 thirteen thousand seven hundred and sixty-seven persons were members of Chelyabinsk Muslim charitable society library. Four thousand four hundred and thirty-five books were given people to read at home. The library “Nazhat” was the most popular among Troitsk Muslims. In 1911 there were nineteen thousand four hundred and thirty-two visitors in this library and board of administration of Troitsk Muslim society drafted one thousand and three hundred rubles for the library maintenance. Troitsk Muslim society also guided six Muslim schools and asylum for poor. So generous financial aid of the Troitsk Muslim society may be explained by the fact that the founders and officials of this society were merchants of the top guild the Yakushevs.

3. Charitable Societies of the Ufa Province

In Ufa province there were fewer Muslim charitable and cultural-elucidative societies than in Orenburg province. Local authorities of Ufa province were more cautious to the issue of opening of Muslim societies. In 1909 all petitions about the foundation of Muslim societies were cancelled by the province authorities. The only Muslim society, which charter was maintained, became “Ufa Muslim ladies’ society”.

“Ufa Muslim ladies’ society” was founded in December 1907. It was the first special society for Muslim women of Ufa and Ufa province. The aims such as “cultural-elucidative and moral-educational”, that society considered the main for its activity, were stated in the charter. The society intended to open different kind of schools for women, to take care about improving the arrangement of educational affairs, to provide material support to teachers and students, to take measures to improve the scientific and non-formal adult education of Muslim women, to open libraries and reading rooms, to organize public lectures, to organize workshops, to open houses of diligence, to fight with the corruption of morals by all legal measures, to open hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages for girls, etc. In the charter there was a special item about membership in the society. It was sad that unlimited amount of Muslim women could be the members of this society. The founders of this ladies’ society were women from the wealthy, influential families of the city and province. The activity of “Ufa Muslim ladies’ society” was mainly charitable. It opened up the library, girls' schools and asylums for the needy and elderly Muslim women. Soon after the appearance of the society, an orphanage for 25 orphaned girls was opened. On the whole, 623 girls were enrolled in schools functioned in Ufa in 1908 – 1909.

“Ufa Muslim ladies’ society” conducted a large and diversified work in the city and the province among the general population. Thus, in the report for 1912 there was reference about supporting of 5 elementary schools, where there were 430 female students. They, together with conventional subjects, were taught to all handcraft. The necessary support materials were given for students from poor families. In an orphanage for girls, maintained at the expense of society, children were taught needlework and sewing shoes of cloth and leather. Two years later, in the report of the society it was stated that there were seven schools in its jurisdiction where 517 female students were taught needlework. “Ufa Muslim ladies’ society” existed mainly through membership fees and donations.

The society made every effort to open a school for girls. After repeated requests to the authorities, the City Government has agreed to build two-story stone house with a wing on Nicholaevskaya Street. Only a wooden outhouse was erected because of financial difficulties in September 1908. Four teachers immediately started training two dozen female students. The school was two-class that is, belonged to a higher type of

elementary schools with a 5-year training course and gave a broad education, as opposed to a three-year course of elementary schools of the lowest type.

In 1909, with the permission of the Governor of Ufa in the various offices and shops the society arranged special chests to raise money for orphaned girls.

By 1916 in Ufa the society maintained five schools, in which there were 440 female pupils and 14 female teachers. One of the institutions of society began to prepare female teachers for Muslim schools. The course lasted for eight years here, along with general subjects pupils studied pedagogy and teaching methods of individual objects, female teachers underwent practical pedagogical training in junior high school [4].

The activities of Muslim societies of Orenburg and Ufa provinces met with various obstacles. First, there were numerous complaints from the conservative part of the Muslim population, who accused the founders and members of charitable societies in undermining parental authority, the moral corruption of the young generation, bringing disrespect to the old order, customs and rites.

For example, a group of Troitsk Muslims in the spring of 1909 appealed to the Minister of Internal Affairs, P.A. Stolypin, a motion to expel leaders of society "for their anti-government, and antisocial advocacy." The petition proposed to close Muslim charity society in Troitsk, the library "Nazhat" and society of stewards.

Although the conducted investigation did not find anything reprehensible in the activities of the society, yet society had not escaped the negative effects of the Muslim conservatives appeal to the Minister of the Interior. Existed since 1901, it was forced to re-register and re-assert the charter.

Secondly, very soon in the wake of the struggle against "pan-Islamism" famous circular of the Minister of Internal Affairs on January 20 of 1910, which was addressed to the governors and mayors, appeared. It stated: "... among the alien elements living in Russia, it was observed the movement of special cultural and educational development of individual nations on the basis of narrow national awakening of political awareness and arrangement a number of societies for this purpose. They aimed to unite alien elements on the basis of their national interests. Because of this I recognize the establishment of such societies on the basis of § 1 of Art. 6 of March 4, 1906 is unacceptable and consider it my duty to tell your Excellency that the discussion of applications to register any kind of alien societies ... treat each case in detail on the question of whether or not such a society pursued the above objectives". Then governors and mayors had to "carefully review the activities of existing alien societies and when necessary start the question of their closing." [5]

According to this Circular the authorities of the Orenburg and Ufa provinces began checking the activities of Muslim charity and cultural-elucidative societies. Some societies had been closed "due to not having a proper permit," others were suspected of spreading the ideas of Pan-Islamism. [6]

In June 1911 after the edition of Law "On the change in the charters of charitable institutions and rules for the management of them" the question of "reliability" of Muslim charities was raised again. Many societies had been forced to submit their charters for re-registration. In 1913 twenty-two societies were closed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 13 of them were Muslim.

Since the beginning of the First World War and Turkey's entry into it on the side of the German unit, the attitude to the Muslim societies in Russia had become even tougher. Minister of the Interior signed an order which allowed "the establishment of only those Muslim societies that by the charter are exclusively charitable in the direct sense of the word." Consideration of the charter of the societies of "mixed type", such as charitable-educational, has been temporarily suspended.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the social importance of charitable, cultural-elucidative and other Muslim societies went far beyond the aims and objectives written into its charters. The activities of Muslim societies, despite the many obstacles, favored to the formation of national identity, culture and education of the local Muslim population.

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