

Abdal Rauf Fitrat

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Jadidism

The need to adapt Islam to modern times became urgent in the nineteenth century as the Muslim world in general realised its weakness and backwardness in relation to the militarily and technologically powerful West. Some representatives of the Muslim intelligentsia began actively advocating reform in religious and other practices and structures (educational, political, cultural and social) to make Islam more relevant to the demands of contemporary society. This approach may be termed 'reformist'. It was a complex process, one which required not just a superficial adaptation of practices but a fundamental alteration of the religious system of values in order to bring Islam into line with the changing circumstances of a new age.

Muslim reformist movements in Asia and Africa have been the focus of much scholarly attention. Analogous developments in Central Asia have, however, been largely neglected. So far as western scholars are concerned this was largely because until very recently much of the relevant material was inaccessible. Soviet scholars, meanwhile, were inhibited by ideological constraints: religious reformism was scarcely a popular topic. There has, however, been an upsurge of interest in the subject since the countries of Central Asia became independent in 1991.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the *Jadid* ('reformist') movement began to affect the Emirate of Bukhara, a nominally independent protectorate of Russia. The movement is named after one of its principal demands: a 'new method' of instruction in schools, *usul-i jadid* in Arabic. The intellectuals who subscribed to this reformist attitude wanted to reform the educational system so that it could revive Islamic values and equip society with modern knowledge and skills, and thereby enable it to catch up with western progress. However, as time went on the wider agenda of the movement became more important: political and administrative reforms were demanded, though still from a wholeheartedly Muslim perspective.

Fitrat's Life

Writer, poet, journalist and political activist, Abdal Rauf Fitrat (1886–1938) was one of the greatest ideologues of Bukharan Jadidism. He was born into a family of petty Bukharan merchants in 1886; his father's name was Abdu Rahim. Fitrat graduated from a *madrassah* ('college') in Bukhara and then for a brief period taught at another *madrassah* in the city (which one is not known). Later he proceeded to Turkey to obtain higher education (1910–14). It is sometimes suggested that he fled to Turkey to avoid persecution by the authorities after the sectarian Shia–Sunni conflict which

erupted in Bukhara on 9 January 1910, on the day of the *Muharram* festival.¹

In Turkey Fitrat established himself in Istanbul where along with other Bukharan emigres he created the *Bukhara Tamim-i Maarif* (Benevolent Society of Bukhara for the Dissemination of Knowledge among the Masses).² His first book, *Munazara (The Dispute)*, a discussion between a Bukharan madrassah teacher (*mudarris*) and a European about new (*jadid*) and old (*qadim*) schools, was published in Istanbul in 1910 (1327 AH)³. Originally written in Farsi (Tajik), *Munazara*, a 61-page pamphlet, was translated into Russian in 1911 by Colonel Yagello and into Turki/Uzbek in 1913 by Shukrullah Samarkandi.⁴ Both translations were published in Tashkent.

Abdalrauf Fitrat used a traditional Central Asian and Middle Eastern style of imaginary travel account in dialogue form. Set in Hindustan, it pits a visiting European against a Bukharan Madrassah teacher on his way to Mecca for a religious pilgrimage. The contents and flavour of *The Dispute* – insistent didacticism and repetitive argument rather than brilliant wit and literary flair – aim at persuading by reason and familiar example rather than by literary invention

wrote Edward Allworth.⁵ *Munazara* was very popular in Bukhara and Turkestan. The Tajik writer Sadraddin Aini reports that the progressive new-method teacher Abdul Kadir Makhdum alone distributed 150 copies of the work. He personally delivered copies to such cities as Shahr-i-Sabz, Kitob, Chirakchi and Yakkabag. He himself would read the book to the illiterate.⁶

Fitrat's second book, *Bayanat-i-Sayyah-i-Hindi (The Tales of an Indian Traveller)*,⁷ published in Istanbul in 1911, was originally written in Farsi. A Russian translation by A. Kondrat'yeva, *Razskazy indiiskago puteshestvennika: Bukhara, kak ona yest'* was published in 1913 in Samarkand (at that time under Russian control).⁸ An edited version of the same translation was published in 1990 by Hamid Ismailov in the Journal *Zvezda vostoka*.⁹ The book is a fictional account of an Indian traveller's visit to the major cities of the Emirate of Bukhara, where he meets a wide range of people, including craftsmen, traders, peasants and *ulama* (collective term for religious functionaries, including teachers and jurists). He holds discussions with them, and through this device Fitrat portrays the Bukhara of his time. He describes the Bukharan educational institutions, the abuse of *vaqf* (charitable endowment) incomes, the corruption and ignorance of the clergy, the belief in superstition, the state of agriculture, trade, industry, health care and the armed forces.

After his return from Turkey in 1914 Fitrat took an active part in the struggle for social, religious and political reforms in Bukhara, especially in the struggle to establish new-method schools. He also led the left wing of the Bukharan Jadid movement.¹⁰

His book *Rahbar-i-Najat (The Guide to Salvation)* was published in Petrograd in 1915.¹¹ *Rahbar-i-Najat*, comprising 224 pages, is a relatively well-organised treatise in which the main features of Fitrat's philosophy are set out: the purpose of human life, the role of intellect/reason, the reasons for the downfall of Islam in general and of Bukhara in particular, the importance of acquiring knowledge and a modern education. The book was written in Tajik, and as far as is known has not been translated into Russian. His other works in Tajik include *Mukhtasar Tarikh-i-Islam (A Short History of Islam)*, written for pupils in the new-method schools, *Oila (The Family)*, and *Saiha (The Cry)*, a collection of patriotic poems.¹² These poems, which clearly express the idea of Bukharan independence, 'had a lightning effect on the readers, as powerful as an electric shock'.¹³ The work was smuggled into Bukhara and circulated

secretly. 'In this period Fitrat's literary work revolutionised ideas in Bukhara', notes Sadraddin Aini.¹⁴

After the February 1917 revolution in Russia Fitrat became the editor-in-chief of the Uzbek newspaper *Hurriyat* (*Freedom*), which was published in Samarkand. Fitrat began writing in Uzbek at this time, probably because of his pan-Turkic sentiments. It is well known that during his stay in Turkey he was attracted to pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideas.¹⁵ His Pan-Turkic inclinations were further strengthened after meeting Faizulla Khojayev (1886–1938) in Bukhara in 1916.

After the February revolution [in Russia] the reform movement [in Bukhara] was led by jadids such as Fitrat and Usman Khojaev, who after their return from Turkey, where they acquired their education, started propagating pan-Turkism. They talked in Ottoman Turkish not only amongst themselves, but also to the inhabitants of Bukhara, the majority of whom could not speak even Uzbek, notes Aini.¹⁶ Fitrat played a prominent part in the abortive pro-reform demonstration held in Bukhara and consequently had to flee to Russian Turkistan.

At the end of 1917 the Jadid organisation assigned Fitrat to work out a new programme. Within two months Fitrat presented his draft to the Central Committee, which approved it with minor amendments in January 1918. The programme (*Muromnama*) was written in Uzbek and advocated amongst other things a constitutional monarchy in Bukhara. (For a description of the work see p. 160–61.) The programme was published in 1920.¹⁷

In 1918 Fitrat founded a literary circle of young Turkistani writers and poets in Tashkent, called *Chaghatay Gurungi* (Chaghatay Conversation; Chaghatay was the common Turkic literary language of Central Asia). One of their main objectives was to modify the Arabic orthography then in use in such a way as to show all the Uzbek vowels, thereby facilitating the teaching of reading and writing in the vernacular. However, the Gurungi came in for severe criticism from the pro-Soviet faction, who dubbed it an 'antirevolutionary bourgeois nationalist organisation'.¹⁸

During his stay in Turkestan Fitrat worked for the Afghan consulate at Tashkent in 1919.¹⁹ He joined the Bukharan Communist Party (BCP) in June 1919 and became a member of its Central Committee.²⁰ He worked for the party press and taught in the first Soviet schools and institutions of higher education. He taught higher mathematics at the Institute of Enlightenment, and later (9 April–15 May 1920) edited the Uzbek socio-political and literary-scientific journal *Tang* (*Dawn*), published by the BCP.²¹

After the formation of the People's Soviet Republic of Bukhara in 1920 Fitrat became the head of the Vaqf department, *nazir* ('minister' or 'commissar') of Foreign Affairs (1922), nazir of Education (1923) and vice-president of the Council of Nazirs as well as of the Central Executive Committee.²² He also remained vice-president of the *Sovet Truda* (Council of Labour) in the government of the People's Soviet Republic of Bukhara.²³ In 1923 he was accused of misuse of power and removed from the ministry. He was offered, and accepted, a professorship in the Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow.²⁴ His works from this period include *Qayamat* (*The Day of Judgment*), published in Moscow in 1923, and *Uzbek Adabiyati Namunalari* (*Specimen of Uzbek Literature*).²⁵ In 1927, Fitrat again returned to Tajik, writing a play entitled *Shorish-i-Vosey* (*The Uprising of Vosey*).²⁶ This work was written in Tajik after a gap of almost a decade.

Fitrat was often accused of promoting Uzbek nationalism, because he openly defended his views on Central Asian literary identity. In 1938 or 1939 he was executed by the Soviet secret police for so-called bourgeois nationalism.²⁷ Most of the

Soviet sources record 1938 as his year of death but are silent about the circumstances. He was partially rehabilitated in the late 1980s.

Political and Social Views

Fitrat's views on contemporary political and social issues are scattered throughout his writings. His general thought on the crisis of the Muslim world is mostly contained in the works written and published in 1910–1915. The most significant of these is *Rahbar-i-Najat*. In this work he expressed his deep admiration for and commitment to Islamic values. However, *Munazara* and *Bayanat-i-Sayyah-i-Hindi*, written slightly earlier, also deal with the concrete political and social issues of Bukhara in some detail.

It was obvious to Fitrat that the Islamic world lagged far behind the western world, and that within the Islamic world the Turkestanis were the most demoralised and backward of all. This view was shared by the great majority of the Turkestan intellectual elite of the time. There were two schools of thought regarding the causes of the situation. One faction ascribed it to lack of education and inertia. The other felt that

Our state of confusion and dissolution is God's will. God has created the world a paradise for infidels [*kafir*] and a hell for the Muslims. The 'Day of Judgment' is approaching, so Islam is being gradually eroded in this world. According to the saying of the Prophet 'every forthcoming day will be worse for the Muslim than the previous one'.²⁸

Fitrat agreed with the former group but believed that there must also be a deeper reason for the problems.²⁹ The verse 'Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their heart'³⁰ encapsulated for him the energy and dynamism of thought that had enabled Islam to spread to Arabia, India, China, Tataristan, Turkestan, Afghanistan, Persia and Andalusia. The crisis of the Muslim world in general manifested itself in a particularly acute form in Bukhara.

There was a time when our own country was recognised as the 'rising dawn of civilisation' and the 'source of the river of knowledge'. Scholars such as Farabi, Bukhari, Bu Ali [Avicenna – Ed.], Ulugh Bek and others were introduced to the world by our motherland. It was our country which, through our great scholars, spread the message of our dignity to the whole world. Our crafts achieved such a level that the Abbasid caliphs, despite all their grandeur and might, borrowed their style of dress from our country.³¹

Their ancestors, said Fitrat, had realised the importance of learning, as illustrated by the Quranic verse 'Are those who know equal to those who know not?' and had constructed over 200 madrassahs.³² He described how in the past Bukharans had great respect for knowledge and gave alms to support scholarship.³³ Yet, he pointed out, though

Bukhara was the dominion of powerful scientific forces, which trained 400,000 scholars and spread them to every nook and corner of the world, this 'sky of the Sun of civilisations', 'paradise of humankind', 'well-organised home of sciences of the world', 'auditorium of knowledge of the universe' is being ringed around by mountains of sad stupidities and hobbled

by the chains of contempt. This lifeline of the East, despite the presence of all these resources for progress, has allowed death to seize it by the throat. All these places of blessings and constant flow of great sums of money have gone into the despicable hands of a few usurpers who fear not God. Their base and corrupt acts have turned society into a society of the gluttonous.³⁴

Fitrat identified the moral bankruptcy and hypocrisy of the Muslim world as the basic causes of its decline:

We consider ourselves Muslims but knowingly ignore God's commands and fearlessly do what has been forbidden by God. We do not stand united, do not cultivate piety, do not consult each other, do not take a single step in the cause of truth, but accept interest [*riba*] and bribes, drink alcohol, indulge in gossip and jealousy. In short, we indulge in all the prohibitions of the *sharia* and are in the grip of bad morality. Despite all these shortcomings we consider ourselves the 'perfect' Muslims and call those who try to stop us from committing these injustices infidels. We boast seventy times in a single breath of being Muslim but do not act like perfect Muslims at all.³⁵

He accused those who uttered 'I believe in God and His Angels ...', but did not act according to the faith, of hypocrisy.³⁶ To emphasise his point he referred to the Traditions of the Prophet: 'Faith and actions are interrelated, none is right without the other.'³⁷ A practical example illustrated this even more pithily:

You believe in the existence of the *mirshab* [chief of the night police] of Bukhara, and that he may imprison those who disobey his orders. If the *mirshab* orders you not to come out of your homes after sunset, would anybody dare to leave his home, violating the orders of the *mirshab*? Surely not, because you believe in the existence of the *mirshab* and the jail. You have faith that anybody acting against the orders of the *mirshab* will be jailed. Had the Bukharans faith in the existence of God and the reality of the Day of Judgment as much as they have in the existence of the *mirshab* and the jail, if they had given importance to the commandments of God equal to that they give to the orders of the *mirshab* of Bukhara, they would not have acted against the commandments of God.³⁸

Fitrat was critical of three tendencies prevalent amongst the Muslims of his age, especially the Bukharans. Firstly, there were those who considered eating and sleeping the only purpose of life. If they had water to drink, a piece of bread to eat and a bed to sleep in they did not worry about anything else. All that concerned them at night was tomorrow's food, and during the day, a bed for the coming night. In short, they could not think of anything except worldly comforts.³⁹ Secondly, there were those who would not act at all to secure their own well-being and happiness in this world. They believed that only infidels pursued this goal. Yet 'to renounce the terrestrial world and to seek the World Hereafter alone is not in conformity with the holy *sharia*', claimed Fitrat.⁴⁰ To prove his point he quoted the Quran:

He it is who created for you all that is in the earth.
See you not how Allah hath made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth and hath loaded you with His

favours both without and within?

And hath made of service unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; it is all from Him.⁴¹

As these verses clearly indicated, it was misguided to assume that ‘the terrestrial world is hell for the Muslims and paradise for the infidels,’ and to ascribe this to God’s commandments. Thirdly, there were those who believed in the pursuit of happiness in both the worlds, but did not act in such a way as to attain these goals. Fitrat argued:

If one asks them, ‘You seekers of happiness in both worlds, why do you not make an effort in that direction?’ their answer is ‘*Allah karim*’ [‘God is gracious’] and they go to a mosque or *mazar* [tomb] and pray. ... Such prayers of the Turkestanis will not be granted because, after having a good night’s sleep and having wasted the day in useless activities, we go to a mosque or a tomb to pray and seek favours from the Lord and return only to engage in unworthy and useless activities. We never make an effort to achieve our objectives. Such prayers are not acceptable to God and will never be granted. Anyone having an objective must first try to make an effort, and then should pray.⁴²

Fitrat gave many examples of this mistaken interpretation of *tawakkal* (trust). For example, if one asked a retailer why he opened his shop only once a week; or asked a farmer, as spring was approaching, where his implements were; or criticised a porter, saying, ‘You do not have a piece of bread to eat at night, why do you sleep all day?’ they would answer unanimously ‘*tawakkal ba Khuda*’ (‘Trust in God’). For Fitrat this had nothing to do with *tawakkal*. ‘It is sheer ignorance, laziness and inaction – *tawakkal* devoid of action is like prayer devoid of action. Hence, of no use.’⁴³ The Quran instructs: ‘Consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when thou art resolved, then put thy trust in Allah. Lo! Allah loveth those who put their trust in (Him).’⁴⁴ To Fitrat this meant that God advised his Prophet first to consult with the people, then, after reaching a unanimous decision, to act, leaving the rest to God.

Fitrat was highly critical of superstitious beliefs, including the practice, prevalent in Bukhara, of visiting the mausolea of saints. He wrote extensively on this subject. As he explained, the Prophet allowed visits to cemeteries only to arouse fear of the Day of Judgment. ‘Abu Hureirah instructs, “Pay visits to the graveyard, since this will remind you of the Day of Judgment”.’⁴⁵ Fitrat argued that human beings commit sins because they lack faith in God and the Day of Judgment; conversely, full faith in the existence of God and the Day of Judgment prevents human beings from committing sins. Some people, due to ignorance and negligence or haughtiness and pride, forget about the Day of Judgment, lose their fear of God, commit sins and do not repent. For those people, visiting a cemetery would be beneficial. However, it is wrong to visit the *mazar* of the *avlia* (saints, holy men) to seek help, although the Quran says ‘... And beside Allah there is for you no friend or helper’.⁴⁶ ‘The sharia has forbidden visiting the *mazar*. By visiting the *mazar* one becomes a sinner,’ maintained Fitrat.⁴⁷ He regarded as idolatrous the practice, which he had observed at the mausoleum of Bahauddin, of bowing to the flag planted at the head of a holy man’s *mazar*, which he equated with the Christian practice of bowing before the cross.⁴⁸ In answer to the argument that people do not pray at the *mazar* to seek help, but rather to explain a particular situation to the Lord, Fitrat said that ‘the very act of finding intermediaries (between God and man) is seeking help – a contravention of the sharia and therefore a

sin.⁴⁹ Fitrat quoted the Quran: ‘Beside Allah they worship that which neither hurteth them nor profiteth them, and they say: “These are our intercessors with Allah”’; also, ‘Unto Allah belongeth all intercession’.⁵⁰ Fitrat believed that treating saints as intermediaries and praying to them eroded the difference between monotheism and polytheism. He quoted the story that once during pilgrimage Umar reached the *Hajr-i Aswad* (Black Stone), kissed it and then said, ‘(O stone) I know that you are a stone and cannot harm or benefit anyone. Had not I seen the Prophet kissing you I would not have kissed you at all.’⁵¹

There was a prevalent belief in Bukhara at that time, a belief encouraged by the ulama, that the tomb of Bahauddin would defend the state if it were threatened by any outside aggression. ‘Has God Almighty given the command to wage holy war (*jihād*) to defend Islam, in many verses of the Quran, to the living or the dead?’ asked Fitrat. ‘Why do you pronounce the duty of defending Islam, which God obviously entrusted to you, the living, to be the duty of the dead?’⁵² In Fitrat’s view Bukhara had already lost its independence to the Russians. The emir received instructions from the Russian emperor, and the *kushbegi* (chief minister) from imperial political agents. These instructions might be termed friendly advice, but ‘why does the emir in turn not give such instructions to the Russian ruler?’, asked Fitrat. ‘If Bukhara has been taken by the Russians, why does Bahauddin not liberate it?’⁵³

Fitrat warned his fellow countrymen of dire consequences if they did not mend their ways. ‘If we continue to follow our old ways, do not learn the lesson from our miseries and misfortunes, and do not act according to God’s will, the worst may happen ...’⁵⁴ He quoted the Quran:

When We resolve to annihilate a people, We first warn those of them that live in comfort. If they persist in sin, We rightly pass Our judgment and utterly destroy them ... I bore long with many nations: then in their sinfulness My vengeance smote them. To Me shall all things return. Say to them: I have been sent to warn you plainly ... And when they provoked Us, We took vengeance on them and drowned them all, making them a lesson and example to those who succeeded them.⁵⁵

These verses were a clear indication to Fitrat that disobedience to God had been the cause of the destruction of his people.⁵⁶

The Decline of Education

One of the most important reasons for the decline of Bukhara was, according to Fitrat, the state of its education system. As he pointed out, ‘It is a well-known fact that our forefathers were distinguished scholars in almost every field of knowledge, especially in science and ethics. Their knowledge of science and ethics did not consist of mere polemics; rather they knew the important principles of science and applied them well.’⁵⁷ Bukhara had been the home of such great scholars as Bu Ali, Farabi, Muhammed ibn-i Ismail Bukhari and Ulugh Bek. Realising the importance of learning, the Bukharans had built numerous madrassahs and allocated fixed vaqf for them.⁵⁸

The madrassahs fell into three categories: higher, secondary and lower seats of learning. Fitrat listed 33 institutions of higher learning in Bukhara. Collectively, they were allocated vaqf worth 2,815,000 *tenga* (422,250 roubles) per annum. The amount of the vaqf allocated to a madrassah varied and depended upon its size. For example, madrassah Jafar Khoja was allocated the largest vaqf, worth 250,000 *tenga*

(37,500 roubles), and madrassah Ibrahim Akhund the smallest vaqf, worth 40,000 tenga (6,000 roubles). A vaqf worth 150,000 tenga (22,500 roubles) per annum was allocated to the madrassah Kukaltash, which comprised 140 rooms for students, a lecture theatre, library, mosque and communal kitchen. Thousands of tenga went to the library, 24,000 tenga were taken by the mudarris and the rest were distributed amongst the imam, *sufi*, yard-keeper, water-carrier, barber and the owners of the rooms.⁵⁹ Fitrat catalogued a list of 39 seats of secondary learning in Bukhara, with an annual allocation of vaqf worth 961,000 tenga (144,150 roubles). Madrassah Ir Nazar received the largest amount, 35,000 tenga (5,250 roubles) and madrassah Jura Bek the smallest, 12,000 tenga (1800 roubles). There were more than a hundred lower madrassah with a collective vaqf of 500,000 tenga. The vaqf varied from 1000 to 5000 tenga per madrassah per annum.

Besides madrassah, there were more than 300 *mekteb* (primary schools) in Bukhara.⁶⁰ An annual vaqf worth 43,100 tenga was allocated to the eleven big libraries collectively. The vaqf varied from 18,000 tenga (2700 roubles) for the library Jafar Khoja to 800 tenga (120 roubles) for the *kutab khona* (library) Mirza Ulugh Bek.⁶¹ There were 20 big and 20 small community dining halls (for students and the poor), each having an allocation of vaqf worth 10,000 – 40,000 tenga and 4000 – 9000 tenga respectively. In addition there were five or six Quranic schools and 40 communal baths which had a significant amount of vaqf at their disposal.⁶²

Gradually, the world changed, efforts and knowledge gave way to laxity [*susti*] and imitation [*taqlid*]. Writing [*nawishtan*] became confined to immoral compilations. Men of letters [*arbab-i-faiz*] did not display any competence except in writing songs of praise [*qasida*] and presenting them to the rulers. Even after fifty years, if a man of letters [*sahib-i kalam*] wrote something, it was a collection of poetry [*divon*], which could not benefit readers in the religious or temporal worlds.⁶³

Despite all these educational establishments and their vast resources, the standard of education had fallen to such an extent that, according to Fitrat, there was hardly a man in the town who could pronounce the name of God correctly: people would say *Avah* or *Ablah* instead of Allah.⁶⁴ Fitrat claimed that students in Bukhara spent 39 precious years in vain.⁶⁵ Children at school learned ‘how to steal, beg and be ill-mannered’.⁶⁶ ‘The mekteb and madrassah, instead of teaching erotic poems, which fatally influence morals, and senseless investigation of the mystical laws of the Quran, should have occupied themselves with the correction of morals,’ wrote Fitrat.⁶⁷

In Fitrat’s view, the basic cause of the decline of education in Bukhara was unnecessary engagement in the irrelevant complexities of the Arabic language at mekteb and madrassah.⁶⁸ The decline had begun some 200 years earlier (at the beginning of the eighteenth century) with the arrival of Mirza Khan of Shiraz, when the Bukharan ulama began limiting their studies to the explanation of particular words, in marginal notes written on the books. Later, commentaries were written upon commentaries until the texts themselves were completely forgotten.⁶⁹ Certain works on theology accumulated more than half-a-dozen layers of commentary, usually devoted to superficial quibbles and verbal disputes. By Fitrat’s time the teaching in schools no longer attempted to grasp the subject of the texts studied but merely investigated their linguistic peculiarities. This encouraged memorising rather than real understanding, and led to a dearth of original work.⁷⁰

Turkestanis, who often acquired their education at Bukhara along with the

Bukharans, fell into this fathomless stupidity and negligence. Consequently ‘the shining star of heavenly civilisations’, ‘the brightest page of human history’ [i.e. Turkestan] found itself in such a dismal situation that it is shameful to discuss it with either friends or foes.⁷¹

Moreover despite the heavy emphasis on learning the Arabic language and grammar, Bukharans could hardly speak Arabic.⁷²

Fitrat illustrates this fact in his book *Bayanat-i-Sayyah-i-Hindi*, when the Bukharan mudarris consults a dictionary to understand a few everyday sentences uttered by the fictional Indian traveller.⁷³

Fitrat argued that science was the path to progress. As he explained,

Science is such a powerful tool, the possession of which enabled the wild Americans to reach their contemporary high level of civilisation and grandeur, and its absence amongst the civilised Persians hastily plunged them into servility and disgrace. Science ... is a means that enabled a handful of island-dwelling Englishmen to become masters of India, Egypt, Baluchistan and part of Arabia, and uncivilised Russians rulers of Tatar, Kirghiz, Turkestan and Caucasian Muslims; finally, it is the lack of science in Turkey that has been responsible for the loss of its vast territories to the French. ... If the Muslims of Turkestan continue with their old system of education and deprive themselves of learning the useful sciences, in a few years Islam will totally disappear from Turkestan except for names in history books.⁷⁴

The Role of the Ulama

Fitrat blamed the ulama for the moral and intellectual decline of Bukhara. ‘The Bukharan ulama, having captured all paths leading towards progress, plunged the well-being and the very existence of the nation into flames.’⁷⁵ He described them as

... the people who have attained high positions in Bukhara but do not have any conception of the modern sciences. After twenty years of learning and twenty years of teaching they become *mufti* [jurisconsult, jurist entitled to issue *fatwa* (edicts)]. Finding the books written in Arabic difficult, they turn to the books of sharia in Persian. They consider that religious matters depend upon their opinions and aims, and therefore they interpret the verses of the Quran according to their wishes and freely reinvent the Traditions.⁷⁶

They thought, for example, that ‘during the [ritual] ablution, those who blow their nose with the left hand or wash their foot from the right side will suffer hell-fire for 70,000 years’; ‘those who miss greeting an *alim* [one of the ulama, a learned man] even once will become infidels’; ‘the sins of those who pass along a street which has been touched by the feet of an alim even once will be forgiven and they will go to heaven’. In the field of cosmology: ‘in the Fourth Heaven, there lives an angel who has 70,000 heads, every head has 70,000 tongues and every tongue can speak in 70,000 languages’.⁷⁷

Fitrat ridiculed them: ‘O you who know not God, who reside permanently in Bukhara and do not know anything even about Samarkand, how can you say anything about the Fourth Heaven? This is not religion; where has the sweet talk of religion gone? ... The vile acts of the Bukharan clergy serve as the basic cause of the

spiritual extinction of the nation.⁷⁸ More specifically, he claimed,

If you [the ulama] had not shut the door of progress and enlightenment [*ijtihad*] to Islam; had not spread undisguised savagery; had not limited the acquisition of armaments to the bow and cold steel; had not kept soldiers in the army until they were seventy; had not forbidden the production of cannons, weapons, bombs, dynamite and military science; had not divided the united and powerful Muslim nation into sects like Shia, Sunni, Zeydi, Wahhabi and so on and created hatred and animosity amongst them; had not distorted most of the Quranic verses to suit your passions; had not helped the usurpers in denying the rights of the people through servility and flattery; then Islam would not have found itself in such an appalling situation.⁷⁹

Fitrat was outraged by the corrupt practices of religious officials. For example, the *kazi-i-kalan* ('chief justice') recommended flatterers irrespective of merit or qualification to the emir for appointment as alim, mufti or mudarris.⁸⁰ These were extremely lucrative posts. An alim, for example, might receive 30,000 tenga a year from a madrassah, 20,000 for similar work, and another 12,000 by defrauding the students.⁸¹ A mufti earned up to 30,000 tenga from the madrassah and more again for putting the official seal on legal documents. Bukharan officials, despite having such lucrative jobs, demanded money from the students to start teaching any new book. Such abuses were commonplace, since they thought, 'Nobody moves without self-interest in this era'.⁸²

The problem was not unique to Bukhara. Fitrat pointed out that throughout the Muslim world

the ulama has been engaged in all forms of malpractice for the last three centuries. Until very recent times, the majority of Turkish, Tatar, Indian and Persian scholars, like their Bukharan counterparts, sucked the blood of their own people. However, having realised the gravity of the situation earlier than the Bukharans, those other nations acted quickly to overthrow them. In a very short time they were able to distinguish authentic scholars from the selfish mullah-worshippers. They gave respect to the former and crushed the latter.⁸³

It was the duty of scholars and clerics to direct people towards the path of unity and agreement, to stimulate the people to learn modern sciences, and to help in the opening of new schools so that Muslims could make progress, maintained Fitrat.⁸⁴

The Roles of the People and Rulers

Fitrat accused the ordinary people of contributing to their misfortune and the decline of Bukhara through their ignorance and blind subservience. 'People should always remain people and should not descend to the level of animals.'⁸⁵ He reminded his readers that the Quran states unequivocally that 'we created man of the best stature'.⁸⁶ It was man's duty to make full use of all his faculties and all the opportunities that existed in the world, since, as the Quran teaches, the Lord 'hath made of service unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth'.⁸⁷ Fitrat argued:

If everything that exists in the heavens and the earth had not been for the service of humankind, the Europeans would not have invented balloons and aeroplanes to fly. How could human beings, who according to the

Quran are the highest beings, to whom heaven and earth are subservient, whose hands can mould iron into wax and move mountains, turn into a flock of sheep?⁸⁸

He spoke of the Bukharans as ‘the nation which has been deprived of every right and is still obedient, bowing down before its oppressors as though it were an honour. The nation which, having fallen into the blind well of ignorance, calls its redeemers infidel – how can one place one’s hope in such a nation?’⁸⁹ He continued, ‘O poor people, your legal rights have been usurped and you have become the adherents of the usurpers; your blood is being sucked, your property is confiscated, your honour and reputation are set on fire and you do not realise it.’⁹⁰

Fitrat reserved his greatest scorn, however, for the *umara* (rulers), who generally attained their high posts by good luck. He identified two categories. First, ‘the illiterate sons of rulers who during the rule of their fathers engage in all manner of stupidities and misdeeds; they lack any trace of admirable human qualities’. Second, ‘shopkeepers and merchants, for whom filling their stomachs is the most desirable act in this world and the next. They consider education superfluous and are not interested in the progress of the country.’⁹¹ The emir of Bukhara, he argued, was an exception, since he genuinely cared about his subjects: ‘Our emir is himself just, but the majority of his officials have never even heard of justice. This is the basic cause of the downfall of our country. And if the system remains unchanged we will never be able to rise again’.⁹²

In the introduction to *Munazara* Fitrat addressed the emir as ‘dear father of Bukhara, saviour of the world’; he thought that reforms in Bukhara were possible under the leadership of the emir.⁹³ In the first years of his reign Emir Abdal Ahad had acquired a reputation as a reformer: he formally abolished slavery on his accession (though under Russian pressure), closed the infamous underground prison in the citadel at Bukhara and ended executions by impalement or hurling from the top of the 200-foot Great Minaret.⁹⁴ However, the effect of these reforms was limited. Slavery lingered on in the form of debtor’s bondage and inhuman penal conditions continued at least in the *vilayat* (provinces). The system continued to ignore the needs of the population at large in order to enrich the emir and his administrators.

After the death of Emir Abdal Ahad in 1910, Emir Alim on his accession to the throne issued a manifesto to eliminate the most serious abuses.⁹⁵ To put an end to corruption at all levels he forbade anyone to present gifts to officials, court dignitaries, or himself; forbade officials of lesser rank to impose taxes; forbade the kazi to fix the price of legal deeds at will; and promised that real salaries would be granted to state servants. He also declared that, unlike his predecessors, he personally would not trade in cotton and *karakul* (fur). Emir Abdal Ahad used to buy cotton and *karakul* from farmers at a very low price and sell it to Russian merchants for an enormous profit. Though the manifesto remained a mere declaration and was never implemented, reformists like Fitrat hoped that they might win the emir over to the cause of reform.

Solutions

Fitrat was not entirely without hope that the situation could be retrieved. He believed that the solution to the problem of decline lay in the acquisition of modern European-style scientific knowledge. One objection raised by the conservatives was that pupils in jadid schools would learn such European ways as sitting on chairs. They argued,

‘The Prophet said, “Everyone imitates their own people”; Russians sit on chairs, so if pupils also sit on chairs they will become Russians.’⁹⁶ Fitrat’s reply was that

Firstly it is said in the Traditions that whoever pronounces the words ‘there is no god but God’ will not fall into Hell. Secondly, if such an insignificant resemblance were sufficient to become infidel, when your ulama, like fire-worshippers, fasten gold and silver around the necks of their horses, they may also become fire-worshippers. Thirdly, the Lord made your eyes and ears like Russians’, has that brought any harm to your religion? Fourthly, the Russians did not invent sitting on chairs: Bek Abi Sufian, one of the greatest courtiers of the Caliph Muavia, first sat on a chair. Fifthly, if someone reads the Quran not sent to the Prophet Muhammed [i.e. any other book], sitting on earth or grass, will he become a Muslim? Or if a Muslim reads the Quran with full respect sitting on a chair, will he become an infidel? Sixthly, if you disallow Muslims the new-method schools because children sit on chairs, why do you not forbid the Russo-native schools, where children not only sit on chairs, but also learn the Russian language?⁹⁷

Fitrat considered the education of women absolutely vital for the progress of the country. He referred to the Tradition of the Prophet that ‘it is the duty of every Muslim to seek knowledge’, and to American and French writers who considered women equal to men in matters of reason. He argued that if women were not educated they could not educate their children.⁹⁸ He made the point that it was an indication of quite how far the Bukharans had strayed from the teachings of the Prophet that they were now afraid of the spread of knowledge.⁹⁹ Fitrat stressed that ‘modern European sciences should be learnt. To save Islam the only course left is the opening of new-method schools.’¹⁰⁰

Reform of Health Care, Trade and Industry

Fitrat also addressed specific issues relating to health care and the modernisation of crafts, trade and industry. Health, medical, hygiene and sanitary facilities were very poor in Bukhara.¹⁰¹ Hauz-i Divan Begi (the Pond of Divan Begi) was the chief source of drinking water in the city, but the water was contaminated and harmful to health. Almost half a *man* (1 man being equal to 8 Russian *pudy*, or about 131 kg) of dirt was thrown into the pond by Bukharans daily.¹⁰² Referring to the Traditions and verses of the Quran, Fitrat emphasised cleanliness and the importance of better hygienic conditions.¹⁰³

He urged the government to convert one of the biggest madrassahs into a medical school and to recruit teachers from Russia or other European countries to teach there.¹⁰⁴ He also urged the government to send some of the capable students abroad to study medical sciences.¹⁰⁵ According to Fitrat the annual expenditure for educating ten students abroad was approximately 5000 roubles. For this purpose 40,000 tenga (6000 roubles) of vaqf allocated to the madrassah Dar-u-Shafa (literally, ‘House of Health’) could be used. After returning home the successful students could replace European teachers.¹⁰⁶ There was no harm in sending students abroad, argued Fitrat, since the Traditions advise one to ‘Seek (knowledge) even if you have to go to China’.¹⁰⁷ In support of his argument Fitrat quoted examples from the history of the great Muslim rulers, who invited many foreign, non-Muslim doctors to their capitals and also deputed Christian scholars to translate books of knowledge.¹⁰⁸

Fitrat advocated the modernisation of crafts, industry and trade. He feared the annihilation of local craftsmanship in the face of growing competition from European factory-producers.¹⁰⁹ He recognised the superior qualities of local work; in a comment on the output of a manufacturer of *alacha* (famous Bukharan hand-made cloth) at Karshi, he said,

Your workshop is better than others in Karshi and your *alacha* is finer and more graceful. In fact, your *alacha* is superior to most Russian material, because though their material is finer and prettier it is not durable in the wearing, as yours is. About the fineness and durability of your *alacha* I have heard a story which I shall narrate to you. A Bukharan pilgrim went on *haj* [pilgrimage to Mecca] and took a few pieces of this material for charitable gifts in Medina. For some reason he did not use the cloth there and brought it back. At the port of Odessa the Russian customs officials mistook it for French material and demanded duty; the *haji* [person who has made the haj] tried to convince them that it was ordinary Bukharan cloth, but the officials were adamant, saying that there were no factories in Bukhara which could make such a fine thing and that the haji had bought it in Istanbul. The haji had to pay duty. It was no fault of the Russians, since the *alacha* was really very good and appeared to them to be a French product; in durability it was even superior to French.¹¹⁰

Fitrat asked the manufacturer, 'What do you plan in the future for your craft? Will your art survive another 20 years?' The weaver replied, 'Our craft was a success in the past, it is successful in the present. The future is known to God alone.'¹¹¹

Fitrat, however, was concerned that such crafts would not survive European competition.¹¹² In the past, the Turkestanis had produced almost everything they needed hand-made, from cloth to crockery, and no foreign manufacturer had been able to establish a market; but now the cheapness of imported industrial goods was beginning to drive out native goods, rendering craftsmen jobless. If they had planned for the future and modernised their machines, argued Fitrat, not only would they themselves have been happier but the enormous amounts of wealth taken out by the foreign manufacturers would have remained in the country. He advocated the conversion of small production units into modern factories, and warned that the native crafts would disappear unless this was done.¹¹³

Fitrat argued that in modern times, trade is the basic cause of wars:

Some strong countries send their people to weaker countries, and after attaining certain privileges, they open trade routes. If the natives damage their trade interests in any way they send their troops and colonise the land. If some other big power also has trade interests there, they also send troops to defend their interests, and war begins. Hence two big powers get involved in an armed conflict in a third country due to trade interests. For example, England colonised India to secure trade interests.¹¹⁴

As Fitrat pointed out, the sharia never forbade trade; rather the Quran and the Traditions praise this profession. Moreover, two of the basic tenets of Islam, giving *zakat* (obligatory alms) and performing haj, both require wealth. Two more basic tenets, offering prayers and keeping the fast, can also be better performed by the rich, because both require peace of mind and devotion, which a poor person does not enjoy. The poor have to work hard to earn their livelihood, while the rich have more time to fulfil these obligations. Moreover, the affirmation of the unity of God by

word and by deed (the most fundamental tenet of Islam) requires knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge requires money. That is why, as Fitrat quoted, the Prophet said that 'poverty is closer to unbelief'.¹¹⁵

Reform of the System of Government

Fitrat believed that

Each state official should regard himself a servant first to the state, then to the people and then to the ruler. These officials hold their offices because of the state and the people. If there were no state or people there would be no officials. In the emirate the state officials, after being appointed to a region, often forget God, the people and the region and just try to please the emir by illegitimate and legitimate means. The emir cannot be pleased with officials who destroy the state by robbing the people.¹¹⁶

He cited the saying of the Prophet, 'Each one amongst you is a pastor of his subjects and will be accountable to God.' To him this meant that every official was duty-bound to lead his subjects along the right path.¹¹⁷ He still believed, at this time, in the possibility of reform: 'The day the emir and *vazir* (minister) resolve to reform schools, Bukhara will have 50 seats of higher learning, 150 preparatory schools and 360 elementary schools.'¹¹⁸ The chief reason for Fitrat's apparent faith in the ability of the emir to bring about reform was the fact that he saw no hope of change being initiated by the masses. In the specific conditions of Bukhara reform could be introduced only from the top.

The most explicit and concise expression of Fitrat's political thought is contained in the reform project which he wrote in 1917 at the request of the Central Committee of the Young Bukharan Party. This addressed organisational problems as well as specific issues. The emir was to remain head of state. The kernel of government was to be a council of ten ministers: of agriculture, vaqf, war, finance, the interior, justice, police, transport and mines, public education and foreign affairs, with additional Muslim advisers. The minister of foreign affairs was to preside over this council. Decisions were to be reached by common agreement. Any minister not in agreement with the decision was to resign, and to be replaced by another minister, appointed by the president of the council with the approval of the emir.

Fitrat discussed the particular areas of responsibility of the various ministries. The ministry of agriculture, for example, was to solve specific issues that required pressing attention, including land and water reforms. He advocated the creation of a ministry of vaqf holdings to oversee the problems of vaqf property: the establishment of a special exchequer for vaqf holdings to put in order their revenue and expenditure; the prevention of abuses by tenants and managers; and the investment of vaqf money into commerce and use of the profit for the promotion of education and repairs of the confessional and secular schools, mosques, libraries, reading rooms and refectories.

Bearing in mind the fragile nature of Bukharan independence, Fitrat recommended the creation of a ministry of war to run military affairs. Fitrat wanted the number of servicemen to be raised to 12,000, the maximum number allowed by the Russo-Bukharan treaty, as well as compulsory military service to be introduced for every adult male of 22 years of age, except for students, disabled persons and members of the emir's family. He recommended the establishment of a military academy, the appointment of trained personnel as commanders, and the payment of fixed salaries to soldiers by the state.

Besides the creation of these ministries, Fitrat also proposed the establishment of elected communal councils to oversee public order, street maintenance, the prices of goods etc. He also advocated the establishment of two control commissions. The first was to comprise 20 members. At least half of them were to be Muslim jurists from Russia and the Caucasus. This commission was to approve the budgets of the ministries. The second commission was to be constituted by the people, guaranteeing the freedom of the press.¹¹⁹

Fitrat did not raise the issue of limiting the emir's powers, let alone his overthrow. In essence his programme advocated the establishment of the rule of law by transforming the despotic nature of the existing regime into an enlightened monarchy of the European type. It also advocated the strengthening of the country economically, politically and militarily by increasing the material well-being and cultural level of the people. By 1920, however, Fitrat had accepted the idea of the liquidation of the emirate and its transformation into a People's Soviet Republic; though only after any possibility of rapprochement with the rulers in Bukhara had been exhausted. Fitrat and his comrades, like their predecessor Ahmad Donish (1827–98), reached the conclusion that reforms were not possible under the leadership of the emir.

In January 1920 Fitrat and his comrades organised the Turkestan Bureau of the Revolutionary Young Bukharan Party under the leadership of Faizulla Khojayevev. This Turkestan Bureau, parallel to the Bukharan Communist Party, according to Khojayevev, was aimed at mobilising against the emir all the revolutionary forces which could not come to terms with the communists: petty merchants, artisans, low- and middle-ranking officials and others. The Revolutionary Young Bukharans brought out a paper entitled *Uchkun (The Spark)*, in which they called for the overthrow of the emir and the proclamation of a democratic republic in Bukhara.¹²⁰ In other respects the Revolutionary Young Bukharan Party adopted the programme formulated by Fitrat in 1918.¹²¹ Subsequently, the two Jadid groups – the Revolutionary Young Bukharans and the Communists – merged. At the time of the merger Khodzhayev's views on the strategy and tactics of revolution in Bukhara prevailed, in a way that briefly led to the recognition of a role for the Bukharan reformist tradition and Islam in the future government. After the overthrow of the emir with the help of the Bolshevik Red Army and the proclamation of the People's Soviet Republic of Bukhara, it was the Young Bukharans, despite their merger with the Communists, who dominated the power structures.

Fitrat and his comrades coexisted with the Bolsheviks briefly, but differences soon appeared over issues such as the withdrawal of Russian troops. The emergence of the *basmachi* (a counterrevolutionary guerrilla movement) in central and eastern Bukhara complicated matters further. The defection of some of the leading reformist government officials, such as Usman Khodzhayev, to the *basmachi* camp led the remaining Jadids, headed by Faizulla Khodzhayev, into increased dependence upon Russia, and this resulted in increased subordination. In 1923 Moscow organised purges in the Bukharan party and its membership was reduced from 15,000 to 1500. Most of the Young Bukharans were purged from the state apparatus; Fitrat was deported to Moscow. In 1924 Bukhara was abolished as a state and incorporated into the Soviet Union. The frame of reference had changed entirely: repudiating any reformist or modernist interpretation of Islam, the Bolsheviks made a total epistemological break with the past. An ambitious and revolutionary drive for modernisation in a secular framework began, which made Muslim reformism irrelevant. Most of the intellectuals, including Fitrat, either had to follow the official line or face persecution.

During the Soviet period very little was written about Fitrat until the late 1980s. The main reason for this taboo was the negative assessment of Jadidism by the Soviet establishment; it was regularly described as ‘antirevolutionary’, ‘antipeople’, ‘bourgeois nationalist’. No objective study of Fitrat’s work was therefore possible. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union Fitrat is still regarded with some reserve. It remains difficult to find many of his works in the libraries of Central Asia, other than a few copies of *Strashny sud*, the Russian translation of *Qayamat (The Day of Judgment)*, also sometimes entitled *Sudny den*.¹²² During the Soviet period this book achieved a certain notoriety, since it was used for the promotion of atheistic propaganda. This is evident from the introduction to the 1964 edition, where the reader is warned:

If you are a believer and want to know what the holy scriptures promise you in the life hereafter, you should read this book without fail. The author bases his story on relevant verses of the Quran and other books of Muslim theology. If you are not a believer, the book offers you rich material for the struggle against the narcotic of religion.¹²³

In the post-Soviet period, however, Central Asian and other scholars have begun to show an increased interest in Fitrat’s writings and Jadidism in general. Attempts are being made to reevaluate their role. The Central Asian nations, in search of their identities, and especially of their Muslim past, may find Fitrat’s reformist, liberal and dynamic interpretation of Islam useful as a basis on which to build an identity relevant to the twenty-first century.

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¹²⁰ *Uchkun* appeared for the first time on 15 April 1920. It was published twice a month in Uzbek in Tashkent. A total of eight issues appeared. At its peak, the print run was 5000 copies, which were mostly smuggled into the emirate.

¹²¹ Khodzhayev, *Izbrannyye trudy*, vol. 1, pp. 163–66.

¹²² For example, A. Fitrat, *Strashny sud* (Dushanbe 1964), translated into Russian by K. Nasirov.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 2.